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HENRY IRVING AS "LOUIS XI."

HENRY IRVING

A SHORT ACCOUNT

OF

HIS PUBLIC LIFE

WITH FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS

NEW YORK
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"I EARNESTLY LOOK FORWARD TO GOING TO AMERICA, FOR I LOVE THE COUNTRY AND HAVE TROOPS OF FRIENDS IN IT,

YOURS VERY TRULY,



849898

PREFACE.

THIS little book does not pretend to be much more than a compilation. The author has had no special opportunities for obtaining private information and has never "interviewed" Mr. Irving. The history of his progress as an artist is public property for those who know where to seek it; but to those who do not, or who lack time and patience, the facts and opinions here collected for the first time cannot fail to be interesting, if the man and his art appeal to their sympathies.

Some original remarks on Mr. Irving's acting have been added to those selected from the press-notices in English journals; and the author, in making these excerpts from the papers, has endeavored to exercise an impartial discretion, eliminating those which contain uncritical praise as well as those which betray prejudice or animosity; for Mr. Irving, like every man of distinction and eminence, has suffered both from over-zealous friends and petty, if not malignant detractors. The facts remain: the great fact — Henry Irving himself; and the accessory facts that he is *the* English speaking actor of our time, and that he has done more than any other

man to elevate the naturalism which was first introduced into the humble walks of the drama — by Liston, the younger Mathews, the Bancrofts, and Toole — to such rank and dignity as should make it the worthy handmaid of the stately tragic muse.

Though the criticisms quoted are taken from many and various journals the writer desires to acknowledge a special debt of gratitude to Mr. Frederick Wedmore's interesting and admirable contributions to the *Academy* (a London weekly journal) which are well worthy to be collected and reprinted in a volume.

August, 1883.

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HENRY IRVING.

INTRODUCTORY.

It has been the fate of many men of talent—nay, even of genius—to be born, as the saying goes, before their time; to anticipate, always to their cost, the needs of a future generation, to interpret in language, dark to their own age, the spirit and emotions of a later one. To such men life is made sad by disappointment, even though their gifts may be quickened by suffering, and only a few, it is to be feared, enjoy the prophetic certainty that the crown they have never been permitted to wear will be laid on their grave. There are others whose fortune it has been to be born in due season, to be gifted with the very genius of their own epoch, to utter the aspirations of their contemporaries in accents which rouse an echo in every heart or—if their talents do not rise to such a height of inspiration—to give expression in their lives, their writings, or their art,

to the dumb instinct of common feeling which constitutes what we call the Spirit of the Age.

This instinct, this spirit are the prerogative of the young—the outcome mainly and in the first instance of a blind reaction (sometimes of a conscious revolt) against that continuity of heredity which would otherwise entail on our race a dull and gradual intensifying of every characteristic derived from our forefathers.

The specific mental peculiarities, not being held in check to the same extent in human beings by those external modifying influences which tend to vary or annihilate inherited characteristics in the rest of the organic creation, would accumulate and gain force as time went on, cutting a deeper and deeper groove out of which each succeeding generation would find it harder to move. Conservatism is, naturally, the note of the old, and in its turn and time becomes an inherited characteristic in most of us—as gout, on one hand, or that freedom from a disease which is known as "outgrowing it," on the other, is developed at a certain age in certain families; at the same time it must be owned that there is this enormous difference: The conservatism we develop is commonly an adherence to the ideals of our own youth—not those of our forefathers, and a loving fidelity

to what was once the Spirit of our own Age. We taste the new wine, the heady liquor as we think it, of the recent vintage, and we say "the old is better."

It is in a great measure the pendulum swing of thought between the two extremes of tradition and innovation which gives rise to the historical phenomena of epochs in philosophy, belief, and art. Now and again Tradition holds the bob with a firm hand, or nails it up to the wall; but presently the hand waxes palsied or the nail rusts through: Innovation clutches at the swinging rod, holds it at first with an uncertain grasp, but presently possesses it and regulates its flight; not with unerring judgment perhaps but with some degree of vital impetus, till old Tradition once more arrests it for a time. Nothing can more clearly prove the truth of this statement than the history of Art. In every phase of Art one need remains supreme: our craving for beauty must be satisfied. And is it not a matter of wonder to note what the changes of taste have been—what, in successive periods has been thought beautiful? The subject is trite. Instances without number might be given in which, after periods of vacillation in taste, some master-mind has given a stamp to his art, either of absolute newness of expression

(like Berlioz in music—a man born before his time—and since Berlioz Wagner; like Whistler in painting; like Emerson or Swinburne in literature) or else of reversion to a past type, more or less modified by his own temperament to his own requirements. If he has spoken to the hearts of his contemporaries his expression of beauty is accepted by them, not without criticism, but still as one manifestation of the highest truth.

"Every work of art enshrines a spiritual subject," says John Addington Symonds in a recent work, "and the artist's power is shown in finding for that subject a form of ideal loveliness." What the absolute expression of *loveliness* may be, and what the relative beauty that is compatible with the spiritual content or import of the work, are questions which would need a separate discussion for each branch of art *per se*. "The element of beauty in the Actor's art is perfection of realization. It is his duty as an artist to show us Orestes or Othello, not perhaps exactly as Othello and Orestes were, but as the essence of their tragedies, ideally incorporate in action, ought to be."*

The man who has in his mind such a standard

* Italian By-ways.

of beauty, who can express it in precisely such a manner as his contemporaries can accept, or even hail, as uttering their convictions or feeding their craving—such a man is the Man of his Time.

Such a man is Henry Irving.

HENRY IRVING.

CHAPTER I.

IRVING'S APPRENTICESHIP AS AN ACTOR.

JOHN HENRY BRODRIB, who has assumed the name of Irving, was born near Glastonbury in Somersetshire, in the south-west of England, on the 6th of February, 1838. He was educated in London with the idea of his entering a merchant's office and following a mercantile career to fortune or failure, as the case might be; but his tastes and instincts were essentially histronic and combined, as may be supposed, a determined and masterful will to make such a life repugnant to him. He was placed in an India Merchant's office on leaving school, but he and the desk could never agree; he was still a lad of only eighteen when he first acted in public.

This was at Sunderland, in the part of Orleans in Lytton's play of *Richelieu*, and subsequently,

at the same place, he filled the part of Cleomenes, in the *Winter's Tale*.

The Lyceum theatre at Sunderland had been newly built, and was opened for the first time on the 29th of September, 1856, the night when Henry Irving made his first appearance on any stage.

He remained at Sunderland throughout the autumn, playing small parts; and it was there that he made the acquaintance of Mr. Mead, who played the principal parts when Miss Glyn came for a short time to act Hermione, Mrs. Haller, and Lady Macbeth. There is a story—an *on dit* —that on one occasion, when young Irving's performance of some part had been far from satisfactory, Mr. Mead and Mr. Johnson, being his seniors—and foreseeing perhaps that his ambition and perseverance must triumph in the end—interfered to prevent his dismissal by the wrathful manager. Both these gentlemen are now on the permanent staff of the Lyceum, London; and if the story is true this is a pleasing instance of Mr. Irving's gratitude and friendly feeling.

In the following year Irving was acting at the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh, at that time under the management of Mr. R. H. Wyndham who engaged a succession of *stars* to play various favorite

pieces, keeping a small permanent staff of *utility* actors for minor parts. Among the actors at that time attached to the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh, was the late Mr. E. D. Lyons, two of whose sons, Mr. Edmund Lyons and Mr. Robert C. Lyons, have since acted with Mr. Irving at the Lyceum, under Mr. Bateman's management. Here he again played with Mr. Mead, as well as with other and brighter stars, some now set for ever, but some few still living to criticise and guide the generation that have grown up around them. Miss Glyn was famous in the parts Miss Terry now fills, Portia and Beatrice, but her repertoire was wider. She retired in 1868, but is still a successful reader. Helen Faucit, Mr. and Mrs. Wigan, Buckstone, C. Matthews, Phelps, and others visited Edinburgh from time to time, constituting a complete school of art for any young actor who had the faculty of assimilating all that they could teach.

In the company and under the influence of such sound and thorough artists Irving could not fail to learn the traditions of the old English school of acting—traditions, some of them, which have doubtless come down as from a respectable antiquity and can trace a pedigree through successive actors, even from Shakespeare himself. At

the same time he studied his parts from his own point of view and stamped them with an originality which was not always pleasing. The first time his name is mentioned in the cast there, it is as playing in the *Little Treasure*, Miss Louise Keeley playing Gertrude. "The other parts were well filled by Mrs. Atkins, Miss Nicol, Messrs. Irving, Lyons, and R. H. Wyndham."—*Era*, Saturday, June 20, 1857.—In other cases he is included under a comprehensive *et cetera*.

In the *Era* of January 31, 1858, he is again mentioned by name as one of the *stock*, still at the same theatre; but he is absent from the list of those by whom Mr. Stirling was well supported on February 14th. He is mentioned again as acting in *Esmeralda*, Miss Henrietta Sims playing the Gipsy, and Mr. T. C. King, Quasimodo. On Monday, April 19th, the theatre closed, having ended its winter season—but reopened on the 29th for a summer season, when Mr. Irving played Wormley in the *Love Knot*, Miss L. Keeley being the star.

It is not till June 13th that he is spoken of with any kind of comment, but then it is favorable: "In the part of Fitzherbert," the play being *Victims*, "Mr. Irving has achieved an undoubted success. Animated by a sincere devotion to his

art, as his care and earnestness testify, no doubt he will speedily and successfully fill a higher range of parts than he has hitherto done."—*Era.* Mr. Toole, though quite young, was already an established favorite with the Edinburgh play-goers, and it was at the Theatre Royal, that he and Mr. Irving first made an acquaintance which has since ripened into friendship. Rivals they could never have been, under any circumstances.

July 25th, in *Marriage a Lottery*, "Mr. Irving as Herbert was, as usual, natural and gentlemanly, tasteful in his dress and perfect in his part." Aug. 8th. "Mr. Irving evinces the same care in Quaverly *(Helping Hands)* which characterizes all his acting." In *Perourou, the Bellows Mender*, "a by no means successful piece and the prototype of the Lady of Lyons;" we learn that there was "some admirable acting, and we must not forget Mr. Irving as Raymond * * * who was very good."

"Soyez tranquille," a cook, Sept. 26th, "excellently delineated by Mr. Irving." Oct. 31st. "Mr. Irving as Charles Courtly (*London Assurance*) deserves a word of praise; he, with the other characters, was honored with a call before the curtain."

In November the Theatre Royal closed for the

preparation of a pantomime, and Mr. R. H. Wyndham's company was transferred to the Queen's, where Sheridan Knowles' play, *The Wife*, was put on the stage. It was "very creditably performed, Miss Sophie Miles (Mariana), Mr. Melville, and Mr. Irving (Leonardo), being called at the conclusion." The next piece was *Still Waters Run Deep*, by Tom Taylor; in this Irving played the small part of Dunbilk, the Irish swindler, and showed his unfailing care even in that. "His make up was, as usual, exceedingly good." He next appeared in *A Hard Struggle*, by Westland Marston, and "Mr. Irving, as Fergus Graham, performed excellently." *Helping Hands* was revived for Toole's benefit on the 14th of December, and Mr. Irving was now promoted to the part of Lord Quaverly, a musical dilettante; "his make up and acting were excellent." In January, 1859, Mr. R. H. Wyndham was still lessee and manager of both the Theatre Royal and the Queen's theatre in Edinburgh, and Mr. Irving was still a member of his company. Throughout the winter his name stands on the bills of the Royal in several pieces played before the Pantomime in turn: *My Wife's Mother; Tom Noddy's Secret; The Little Treasure*, and other "light articles," "in which the principal parts have been filled by * * *

Messrs. Ersser Jones, Irving, G. Smythson, etc.," and on Monday, February 15th, "Mr. Irving—in *The Porter's Knot*—as Augustus Burr, gave evidence of his continuous progress as an actor who takes nature as his guide, and is determined to succeed." Again, in *Hamilton of Bothwell Hargh*, "Mr. Irving has acquired new laurels in the part of Cyril Baliol, the plotting priest, and making allowance for the comparative inexperience of so young an actor (Henry Irving was at this time only just one and twenty and had been on the stage little more than two years) the personation is worthy of much praise, and indicative of rapid progress. Messrs. George Melville and Irving have frequently been called to acknowledge the plaudits of the audiences for their able acting in the parts of Hamilton and Cyril Baliol."

Raising the Wind was also being played—Mr. Irving certainly *not* taking the part of Jeremy Diddler, but it is highly probable that some lucky hit—or perhaps some palpable shortcoming—on the part of the actor who did play it suggested to him a rendering of the impecunious scapegrace which has since been very successful. Here too he saw Louis XI. played by Mr. Dillon, "well supported by Messsrs. Jones, Lyons, Irving, etc," He is again mentioned as giving "good support"

in *Single Life*, and as Mr. Lionel Lynd in *Married Life*, and at the close of this *season*, at the beginning of May, Mr. Irving tasted the sweets of his first benefit night. "Monday last, the 2nd, was devoted to the first benefit of Mr. Irving, a young actor whose progress we have frequently had occasion to notice. This gentleman, comparatively a novice on the stage, has been engaged by Mr. Harris for the Princess' Theatre, London, where, we doubt not, he will in a few years, realize our expectations; for, though Mr. Irving undoubtedly displays considerable talent in a varied line of parts, it is, perhaps more for his zeal and rapid progress, his evident determination to excel, and his perceptible realization of this resolution, than for the position he at present holds that he has won the esteem and encouraging approbation of Edinburgh play-goers." The *Era's* judgment proved to be better than its English, though Mr. Irving's provincial experiences were, as it turned out, by no means at an end; nothing but that undaunted determination to rise which characterized him from his earliest youth could have enabled him to triumph over a series of rebuffs and difficulties. On this occasion he played Gustave de Grignon in *The Ladies' Battle*, a strongly-marked character-part, and probably well suited to him,

Captain Beaugard in *The Review*, and Walter Warren in *A Poor Girl's Temptations*.

The Theatre Royal, as it then existed, was closed in May, condemned to make way for the new Post-Office; and the last time Mr. Irving stood on the boards which had been the scene of his early studies and labors and where he had gathered the first buds, so to speak, of that "herb o' grace" fulfilment, it was as Soaper, one of the critics who victimize Triplet in *Masks and Faces*, who "lathers" while Snarl shaves. The whole company now migrated to the Queen's, which reopened in June after a short holiday.

On Friday, the 12th of August, by command of the Prince of Wales, who was visiting Edinburgh, a Scotch piece was to be performed, and *Cramond Brig* was selected and "exceedingly well acted." "Mr. Irving was a King James truly noble in heart and speech, as a King ought to be;" a forecast this, perhaps, of his success as a later and more hapless Stuart King. In a *burlesque of Kenilworth*, "Mr. Irving was great in his make up as Wayland Smith. The originality displayed by this gentleman is remarkable, and had he not been an actor, we think from this feature alone that he would have been successful as an artist." "The ungracious part of Appius

Claudius in *Virginius* was carefully filled by Mr. Irving." (The chief character by Mr. Dillon, an actor who achieved popularity in the English provinces, but who has left no mark on the history of the stage.) He played again "excellently" in *Grist to the Mill*, and on Tuesday, September 13th, 1859, took a farewell benefit, playing Claude Melnotte, a favorite benefit part with all *jeunes premiers*. "We have frequently adverted" (the *Era*, September 18, 1859) "to the rapid progress Mr. Irving has made in his profession by unremitting zeal and study, but on his last appearance he excelled all his previous personations. Some may have deemed it somewhat ambitious that an actor who has not been quite three years on the stage, should attempt the character of Claude Melnotte in *The Lady of Lyons*, but the finish with which Mr. Irving sustained the part effectually proved that he had not over-estimated his powers. Thrice was he called in the course of the piece to receive the applause of a well-filled house. He took leave of his Edinburgh friends in a modest speech."

Mr. Irving now, no doubt, hoped and believed that his *Wander Jahre* were over, and that London, "paved with gold," was for the future to be the scene of his efforts; but Fate was not yet on his side. Nearly seven more years of probation

and patience were still before him, an uphill fight of which few details can be found. But he was young and brave, with that strong self-confidence, which in its lowest manifestations is sheer conceit, but in its highest, self-reliant courage.

Henry Irving had a chance now on a London stage; but that he was not ripe for it is pretty certain or in the dearth of high-class actors, now that Charles Kean had retired (he still played for a short time in the provinces), he must have made his mark. He got no great part given him, it is true, to fail in—perhaps that was not the unkindest trick Fortune could play him—but his manager never put his name in the advertisements, and the few parts before which his name occurs in the critiques are small enough to escape censure, as well as to miss praise.

The Keans left the Princess's, London, in September, 1859, and it reopened shortly after under the management of the late Mr. Augustus Harris with a new play adapted from the French by John Oxenford, and called *Ivy Hall.*

In September, 1859, Mr. Harris opened the Princess's Theatre, London, with *Ivy Hall*, a free adaptation of *Le Roman d'un Jeune Homme Pauvre*, and introduced Mr. Harcourt Bland and Miss Kate Savile from the provinces to a London

public; but Mr. Irving is not named, though we have reason to believe he joined the company at that time. On Saturday, October the 8th a small part was given him in a farcical afterpiece, *The Two Poltts*, and this was probably the first occasion of his coming before a London audience—under circumstances neither flattering nor gratifying, it may be suspected. His name is not mentioned by the critics. In October, however, when Mr. George Melville was playing Hamlet, he took the part of Osrick, not a bad little part as little parts go, with a distinct individuality and an opening for picturesque treatment; but with what heart-burning Henry Irving was by this time beginning to look on at the successes or failures, the beauties or defects of his seniors may be readily conceived.

How far from satisfactory George Melville proved himself in Hamlet may be gathered from a contemporary criticism: "of the language and play he has by no means a firm grasp * * he often glides heedlessly over words and sentences which, even to a careful reader unacquainted with stage traditions, proclaim their own significance." Mr. Melville is advised to eschew "unprofitable ambition," and the critic adds: "we are by no means overstocked with actors strong enough to sus-

tain the ordinary pieces of melodramatic interest."

And at the time when this was written there were only five first-class theatres open in London!

Mr. Irving, as he read these remarks in the *Times*, must have found much to reflect on. His own criticism on the aspirant's performance would be interesting to us now if it were to be found lurking in some diary or note book; and it would probably be quite as sympathetic as severe since he himself had already realized the difficulties of the part. After this he played Rudolphe in a revival of *The Wonderful Woman*, but we find no further mention of his name in the Princess's playbills.

In this year, 1859, we find the first mention of a dramatic reading given by Mr. Irving. It was one night in December, at Crosby Hall in Bishopgate street, a place now used for public entertainments, but interesting to the historian and to the student of Shakespeare as having been between 1475 and 1483 the residence of Richard, Duke of Gloster.* It would be pleasant to imagine that

* Crosby House was subsequently the residence of the great Sir Thomas More, and at a later period when Sir John Spencer lived there many illustrious persons were visitors there. The Countess of Pembroke, Sir Philip Sidney's sister, also lived for some years in Crosby House.

the unsuccessful young actor indulged in some dreams of future triumph and drew an inspiration of bloodless ambition as he stood under the roof where the prince had lived whose presentment it has since been his fortune to realize to the men of a later generation. However on this occasion he was satisfied to render the work of a less poet than Shakespeare, and to follow the fortunes of a minor hero than the ruthless Richard.

"We recollect," says a writer in *Players*, "that Mr. Irving was a gentleman of considerable talent and a great favorite in the provinces"—an unkind touch of the "faint praise" which is so fatal; "and went to hear him read *The Lady of Lyons*. Instead of finding the usual conventional mediocrity which would seem to characterize the dramatic reader, we were gratified by hearing it poetically read by a most accomplished elocutionist, who gave us not only words, but that finer indefinite something which proves incontestably and instantaneously that the fire of genius is in the artist."

Mr. Henry Irving is next heard of as acting at Manchester, October 7th, 1860, as a new member of the company at the Theatre Royal, and as "from Edinburgh;" it is to be presumed, therefore, either that he had not been successful in

London, or that a succession of small parts had neither satisfied his ambition nor afforded him such practice as he had hoped to have. Here he played Adolphe in Plambi's *Secret Service*, Horace in *Daddy Hardacre*, Frank Meredith in *Romance and Reality*, and a leading part in *Diamond Cut Diamond*.

In 1861 his name appears in the cast for *A Word in Your Ear*, "well acted," but changed in February to *George Barnwell* in which he seems to have played the leading part. He is also, "especially mentioned" in a little comedy entitled *Married Daughters and Young Husbands;* the two last pieces, with the pantomime constituting, as we can well believe, "a rather long performance and plenty for the money." His name does not appear in the pantomimes, but it is quite certain that during an apprenticeship of general utility he must have done duty in some parts not strictly legitimate; indeed we have heard that he once figured as one of those cross-grained sisters who led Cinderella such a life. One thing is certain: whatever he did he did his best.

He afterwards filled a secondary part in *The Island Home*, an adaptation of the same French play as supplied Miss Herbert, and Mr. Alfred Wigan, if we remember rightly, with the

materials for a success in *The Isle of Saint Tropez*. Then he played Herbert Waverly in *Playing with Fire*, a comedy by John Brougham, who acted the leading part. "He had a difficult part and acted with much care and feeling, giving us less of his peculiar mannerism, and showing us that he had studied the play as well as the character of Herbert Waverly." (*Era*, July, 1861).

When the Theatre Royal, Manchester, reopened in September, 1861, Mr. Irving was still only thought equal to inferior parts, Mr. D. H. Jones being engaged for leading business, and Mr. Irving standing third on the list of the staff. He had "a very uphill part in the *Family Secret* and got through it creditably." The starring system was then in force at this theatre; a system which secures variety of stage practice for the permanent staff, but small chances of making any advance in position, or "a hit" in a good part. He acted with Mr. and Mrs. Florence, who were very successful; with Charles Mathews, first and last perhaps the most popular light comedian ever seen on the English stage; with Mr. Edwin Booth — when he played Othello, but Mr. Irving did *not* play Iago — and when he played Sir Giles Overreach in *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* — a part

which Mr. Edmund Kean had made famous but which Mr. Irving has not yet attempted — he took the small part of Wellborn. He was the hero in Mr. J. Brougham's next new comedy *Flies in the Web*, and played minor parts in several revivals. On March 21st, Mr. Walter Montgomery played Othello for the benefit of the acting manager of the theatre and Irving, being named next to Mr. Calvert, who played Iago, it is probable that he played Cassio. He was Sir Thomas in *The Hunchback* and is constantly mentioned throughout the season as supporting — "ably, efficiently, carefully" — a succession of actors and actresses who appeared in every variety of drama. He seems to have escaped, or to have refused burlesque parts, but to have worked at every other line of his art. Lovers, husbands, villains, heroes, gentlemen, and blackguards, he was each in turn.

He returned with the same company in September, 1862, playing Captain Howard in the *Peep o' day*, which had an unusually long run of sixty-seven nights. The pantomime took its place, preceded by a *Hard Struggle* in which Irving acted Fergus Graham.

January, 1863, found him still in the same position — "he lacked advancement," and on Friday night, May 15th, when he took a benefit, he

secured the services of the unhappy Walter Montgomery to play Hamlet, while he himself filled the part of Laertes. However, he and his manager seem to have agreed very well, or perhaps necessity was his master, for when several of the permanent staff seceded, their number being greater than was required, Mr. Irving remained at Manchester.

We find his name on September 14th, when he played in the afterpieces, Mr. Sothern engrossing the Manchester public as *Lord Dundreary*. When the piece was supplemented by *My Aunt's Advice* for Sothern to play Captain Howard Leslie, Irving played with him the small part of the husband, and did "that little well." During the winter season he played in the pieces before the pantomime: "the principal part in *Who Speaks First?* with gentlemanly ease and finish;" Bernard Reynolds in *Miriam's Crime;* George Barnwell, etc., Faust, in *Faust and Marguerite*, was a better part, and in April he played Mercutio; "We have not seen Mr. Irving to better advantage, he played the part well."

In May, 1864, the announcement that "he filled the part of Hardress Cregan (*Colleen Bawn*) creditably," is supplemented by the remark that he is becoming "quite a favorite," and on June

the 12th it is announced that Mr. Irving "will take a benefit, when he will appear as Hamlet."

At last! and perhaps this performance lives in Mr. Irving's memory, even to this day, after a series of trials and successes, as the most momentous event of his life—as the crisis of his development, the critical instant of his personal experience, and the test of his individuality. It took place on Monday, June 26th, 1864.

It is to be regretted that no critic was present more competent to judge of the qualities and faults of the performance than the ordinary reporter of the *Era* newspaper. This English weekly, though of value as a record of many events which would otherwise be lost in the gulf of time, is not particularly well served by its provincial correspondents. Men of taste and experience do not care to undertake such small and poorly-paid work, and while the standard of art is not commonly a very high one, a little friendliness, or habits of pleasant intercourse, are not altogether without influence. "One of the most curious experiences of the actor is provided when, on migrating from town to country, or *vice versa*, he first notes the difference between the criticism bestowed upon him in the London journals and the criticism—Heaven save the mark!—which

his performances receive in the provincial press." (*Theatre*). London criticism is often hasty, superficial, not absolutely unbiassed perhaps, but at any rate it is based on some standard of comparison and formed on some variety of experience. Still, we may believe the report which says that "Mr. Irving displayed a careful study and good appreciation of the author, and many parts were admirably rendered." He repeated it on the following Saturday, and he seems to have made good his right to leading parts from that time. He played Hamlet again on the last night of that season having "wonderfully improved."

When the theatre reopened *The Comedy of Errors* was put upon the stage, with Mr. Irving as one Antipholus, and Mr. G. F. Sinclair as the other. He retired again into the part of Laertes for Mr. Walter Montgomery to play Hamlet, and supported him when he played Romeo and Othello. Then he played the pretty part of Maurice Warner in *Camilla's Husband*, and in the course of November he made or improved his acquaintance with Miss Bateman who played Leah, but he does not seem to have had any part in the piece.

In January, 1865, he was playing in the small comedies or farces before the pantomime and never seems to have shirked work of any kind. On the

26th of February, he played Robert Macaire, "with great power," a part he played again after an interval of some years, in London; and again not long since, under Royal patronage, for the benefit of the New College of Music. Haines' drama of *Charming Polly* seems to have been the last piece in which he acted at the Theatre Royal, Manchester. He then, for a short while, joined Messrs. Fred. Maccabe and Philip Day in giving an entertainment at the Free-Trade Hall in that city; "a séance à la Davenport brothers; the burlesque lecture by Mr. Irving caused loud laughter and applause." It must certainly have been exquisitely funny. The performance was repeated two or three times and "a complimentary benefit" was given to Mr. Irving when he took his leave of the Manchester public, after he had assisted his colleague Mr. Maccabe to take his at the Prince's theatre, where he played four times after leaving the Theatre Royal. A committee of his friends arranged an attractive miscellaneous programme for that eventful Wednesday, 12th of April—the last day when Mr. Irving was to be regarded as merely a provincial actor. It was to include the comedy *Who Speaks First*, the burlesque of the Davenports, and the farce of *Raising the Wind*, and "the reception accorded to him was the best

proof of the appreciation and esteem in which this young actor is held by the play-goers of our city. The Hall was crowded with nearly 3,000 persons and he was greeted with vehement and prolonged cheering." (*Era*). He acted again at Manchester, Wednesday, May 4th, for the benefit of Mr. Robert Cooke the treasurer of the Prince's Theatre, who "was so fortunate as to secure his services for the part of Nemours in Louis XI.," and he repeated "the exposé of the Davenport brothers with Messrs. Maccabe and Day," for Mr. Day's benefit at the end of the month. He played Edmund in *King Lear* for Mr. Calvert's benefit in June, and Frank Hawthorne in *Extremes* for Mr. John Nelson's, and he then performed for a week as Edmund till the end of the season at the Prince's, following it up every evening with Dick Hazard in *My Wife's Dentist.*

We next find Mr. Irving acting at Douglas the principal town of the Isle of Man, a speck of land lying between England and Ireland in the Irish Sea. He here played in the *Wonderful Woman*, and *Married Daughters*, and took his benefit on the 24th of July in *My Wife's Dentist.* From thence he went to Oxford and played in *London Assurance*, with what would be thought in these days of elaborate touring, a rather scratch com-

pany, including however some very respectable names. *The Ticket of Leave Man* was revived and Irving played the Lancashire lad Bob Brierly. After this we find little trace of Henry Irving's proceedings till he returned to London and began that career of steady progress which has brought him to such eminence. He probably went on practising his art in minor parts at various country theatres. He is mentioned as playing at Liverpool in June, 1866—Ironbrace in *Used Up*, to Charles Mathews' Sir Charles Coldstream, and he took a benefit in Robert Macaire.

The lesson — the moral — of the early years of Henry Irving's public life is simple and easy to read. He has from the first had that infinite capacity for taking pains which, if it does not actually constitute genius — and we are far from agreeing with the great man who said it did — is certainly an indispensable concomitant. He has never shirked work, and we cannot but marvel at the indomitable ambition and determination which when he did not succeed in London in 1859, carried him through seven years more of drudgery in the provinces.

For provincial acting is drudgery; under the old-fashioned starring system it was desperately hard work. Every fortnight, or oftener, a fresh

play had to be got up, or, even more frequently, some variation in the stage arrangements or business of an old one had to be learnt; this involved constant rehearsals; constant refreshing of the memory and extreme flexibility of habit. It was admirable practice but very exhausting — how exhausting, none but those who have some knowledge of the actor's art can fully understand. The touring system, which is now so much more common — a system by which a leading actor takes his whole company with him — has in some measure altered this, but not we trust "reformed it altogether," for it seems doubtful whether it will produce such good actors as the permanent staff-system. On that old plan a second-rate actor now and again got a chance of making his mark when there was no star in the ascendant, and one thing he was almost always sure of: variety of experience. It is only in a vast metropolis like New York or London that there is such a supply of play-goers, practically unlimited, as can keep one stock piece on the boards of a theatre for a run of several weeks or even months. A narrower circle of audience must be tempted by more variety. It is to this that an actor like Irving, who was to all intents and purposes an actor of general utility for ten years, owes the

extraordinary variety of experience which he can now bring to bear on his great parts. It is evident at a glance that no one small part could give an actor the stage practice which would enable him to follow it up at once with Hamlet, Richard III., or Richelieu. A villain in a melodrama — a lover in a comedy — a character part, however marked, affords experience in one groove only for the time being. If an actor is many sided by nature, he will play each well in turn — and better each time; and by such a process he will learn to use his means of expression with appropriate variety — his tones of voice, that is to say, his facial expression, his gesture, and action. Then his mind will develop eclecticism, his imagination grow more fertile, his sympathies expand, and his taste become more fastidious with exercise; his genius will assert itself as the governing spirit of the materials thus collected and the means thus mastered. The man — if he is a born actor — will find that he can act.

There are, alas, two alternatives to this happy consummation: He may not after all be a born actor or, even if he be, he may never learn to act. We could make a melancholy list of failures in both these kinds. The catalogue of the first class is a short one, but it is a glorious one. It must,

we like to believe, be headed by Shakespeare, and include Burbage, Betterton, Garrick, and Edmund Kean.

Now, at the end of his long probation, Henry Irving hoped to add his name to this list.

Has he succeeded? Yes, we think he has. We think he is the actor born, we know he has learnt his art. That he is without a flaw or a defect no one could pretend to assert, but he has imagination, sympathy, and taste; even after thirteen years of *Meisterschaft* we may trust to these great qualities to judge and mitigate the defects of which, we may be sure, he is as well aware as his critics.

When he was still quite young he showed the stuff that was in him, not the talent merely but the philosophical ambition and tenacity of purpose. There is a story told of the late highly-respected actor Samuel H. Phelps which seems to prove that he thought Henry Irving fully justified in his choice of a profession. While he was still a lad in a merchant's office he went to see Mr. Phelps, then at Sadler's Wells theatre, and explained his ambition. "Sir, don't go on the stage," said the elder man, "it is an ill-requited profession." His advice however was not to be listened to. "In that case," said Phelps, "come here, and

I'll give you two pounds (ten dollars) a week to begin with." The young fellow, however, thought he should get better practice in the provinces,— and perhaps he was right.

Dion Boucicault too, a man of wide experience of men and of actors, discerned at a somewhat later period the fine material of which young Irving was made. On the occasion of some semi-private theatricals of which Mr. Boucicault had the management, he took steps to secure Irving's services in *London Assurance*, in some part superior to any he was at that time playing in public, and thus introduced him to a select and judicious circle of connoisseurs. Such a lift, however transient in its immediate bearings, leaves its mark on a man's career. Mr. Irving has had noble and influential friends and he may perhaps have owed them to his personal demeanor on this occasion as well as to his dramatic talent.

CHAPTER II.

IRVING IN LONDON TILL 1878.

THUS for ten years had Henry Irving been practising and rehearsing, as it were, for the London stage before he fairly set his foot on the boards of the great city.

Although, as we have said, local criticism is neither appreciative nor trustworthy, it is quite clear that the young actor's career had not been one of constant disappointment. He had gradually conquered the sympathies of audiences when he had failed to captivate them, and enthralled many whom he had failed to enchant. He had, no doubt, made many delicate experiments on their sensibilities, and had tested every side of that masterful individuality which is now an instrument in his hands on which he can play with the subtle devilry with which Paganini is said to have used his violin — sometimes insisting on an unresolved discord with such emphasis and tenacity that the closing harmony is almost

swamped in our ears, sometimes rushing to the very verge of the gulf, a deep one for all that it is but a step across, between the sublime and the ridiculous.

The real art of the actor consists, no doubt, in the power of absolutely separating the *ego*, the subjective *I*, from the objective *I* — the personal physique in which he has to find all his means of expression. Henry Irving appears from the first to have understood instinctively the limit line, beyond which this divorce of the physical from the metaphysical man cannot safely go — for that there is a limit all the greatest actors seem to have felt — indeed, most of those faults of trick and manner which have laid him open to just criticism may be referred to that Naturalism which inevitably throws the artist back on *his own* nature. This may arise partly from the reluctance of the man to forego his identity and so lose his personal influence over his audience; partly, perhaps, from an unconscious, instinctive craving for their sympathy with himself, inside and beneath the part he acts. It is nevertheless true that for very high class acting, especially in unattractive parts, total self abnegation is sometimes indispensable.* But

* We have seen Mr. Anson, for instance, play Goodman Scum, in *Clancarty*, in a way which made any impulse of sympathy with the

we may be sure that, in the first instance, Mr. Irving clung to his identity, not merely from instinct but from deliberate choice; and though, now, his warmest admirers would be glad sometimes that it should sink a little further into the background, its originality, power, and charm are beyond denial.

Having thus patiently and deliberately cultivated his art — and his nature — Henry Irving first took his place as a London actor at the St. James Theatre, October 6th, 1866, as Doricourt in the *Belle's Stratagem*, and "Mr. Henry Irving's performance gave the promise of his being a valuable accession to Miss Herbert's company." "He was the fine gentleman in Doricourt; but he was more, for his mad scenes were truthfully conceived and most subtly executed." *(Athenaeum)*. The *Times*, in criticising the performance says: "this work is essentially a play of one character," Letitia Hardy, to wit, only speaking of Doricourt as "heavy company, till he feigns madness in the last act, and the mock insanity represented by Mr. Irving is the cause of considerable mirth."

actor impossible; and we frankly say that as acting it was admirable. The fault in art was the author's—to us it is a fault in art to put a purely repulsive object into any picture or drama.

Mr. Irving seems to have thought better of Mrs. Cowley's comedy than the *Times* critic, though it is true that Miss Terry now fully divides the honors with him in it. Its revival in April, 1881, was a wonderful success, partly in consequence, and partly in spite of the limitation of the interest to the fate and fortunes of Letitia Hardy. In consequence of it, because the sparkling heroine is played by Miss Terry; in spite of it, because Mr. Irving gives value and importance to the part of Doricourt. Of this revival the *Saturday Review* says: "it is not too much to call it brilliant. The wit, the humor, and the courtliness of Mr. Irving's Doricourt were already known to many play-goers. The fun and grace of Miss Ellen Terry's Letitia Hardy approach as near as possible to perfection. The assumption of the hoiden seems to us to be admirable alike in conception and execution, and the piece is mounted with excellent taste and discretion."

The Belle's Stratagem was followed in November by Dion Boucicault's *Hunted Down* (for the first time in London), and Henry Irving played the part of Rawdon Scudamore. This role, the always unpopular one of the villain of the piece, was far less easy to "score in" than that of Doricourt, but we read that "the cool scoundrel

was made quite a picture by the new actor Mr. Henry Irving, whose quiet yet forcible manner, easy gestures, and expressive features give interest to a character by no means attractive." And again "Rawdon Scudamore, a deliberate designing villain, serves to display the talent of Mr. Henry Irving whose ability in depicting the most malignant feelings merely by dint of facial expression is very remarkable." *(Times).*

The *Saturday Review*, in speaking of the play, mentions "two very promising performers entirely new to the London stage—Mr. Irving, who gives a very forcible and finished impersonation of the malignant husband, and Miss Le Thière."

In 1867, *The Road to Ruin* was revived at the same theatre, and Irving played Harry Dornton, the leading part. "He is as yet but little known to the London public, and it may be remarked that though he has not the gallant and graceful bearing of our old light comedians, he acted, especially in the drunken scenes, with intelligence, spirit, and feeling." *(Observer).* "Mr. Henry Irving's Harry Dornton is a more than promising performance by an actor who has only been known to the London public within the last few months. His first appearance is excellently conceived, and

his latter scenes are marked by a most accurate delineation of that sort of inebriety which neither brutalizes nor stupefies. Still, against the substantial good qualities of Mr. Irving is to be set off a certain ungainliness of manner." On Saturday, March the 2nd, 1867, *A Rapid Thaw*, by T. W. Robertson, was produced. "It can only be regarded as a mistake," says the *Times*. Mr. Irving played in it, but though it was strongly cast and admirably put on the stage it had *no legs*. It was taken off and other plays were revived for short runs till Holy-week. On Saturday, March 23rd, Mr. Irving played Joseph Surface in *The School for Scandal*—we should like to see this again—and on March 30th, Robert Macaire.

His next part was Count Falcon, in a new play called *Idalia*, by George Roberts. It was produced on Monday, April 22nd (Easter Monday), and held its place, interrupted only by benefit nights, till the end of the season, May 30th. "Mr. Irving made a portrait of Count Falcon, acting steadily, looking hard, ruthless, and a thorough Italian." *(Observer)*.

The St. James reopened in October, with *Only a Clod;* Mr. J. S. Clarke, announced as a "new comedian," made his first appearance a few days

after in the *Widow Hunt*, still one of his favorite pieces, and Mr. Irving acted in both these plays. Then he had a part in *A Tale of Procida*, and appeared for the last time at the St. James' Theatre, on Saturday, December 21st, 1867, in *The School of Reform*.

On the 1st of January, 1868, Mr. Irving was acting at the Queen's Theatre, Long Acre, London, in the usual "acting edition" of *The Taming of the Shrew*, known as *Katharine and Petruchio*. It was in this play that he first acted with Miss Ellen Terry. At this theatre, too, he again met Mr. Toole and played with him in *Dearer than Life*. Irving took the "ungrateful part" of Bob Gassitt, "a highly-finished piece of acting." "Bob Gassitt, the vulgar conceited scamp, who has lured the thoughtless youth into extravagance, and who affects to be Charlie's firm friend while he is endeavoring to supplant him in the affections of his cousin, is rendered exceedingly effective by Mr. H. Irving who seems to have found his special vocation as an artistic perpetrator of all sorts of stage villany." (*Daily Telegraph*, January 11th, 1868). The play had a good run till April 11th, when *Oliver Twist* was produced, arranged for the stage by John Oxenford, Mr. Irving playing the ruffian, Bill Sykes. "Mr.

Irving's representation of Bill Sykes is for intensity of expression and almost terrible earnestness, something remarkable." *(Era)*. He took a benefit on the 1st of June, playing in *The School for Scandal*, supported by Messrs. A. Wigan and Toole; and we then lose sight of him for a few weeks when we must hope he was taking a holiday.

On July 25th, he played Robert Redburn in Byron's drama of domestic interest, *A Lancashire Lass*. "Of the gentlemanly villain of whom he is the type, Mr. Irving has made himself the sole proper representative." *(Times)*. "Redburn is a modern cigar-smoking scamp, and Mr. Henry Irving, who seems to have studied stage-villany as one of the fine arts in a manner that would have delighted de Quincey, renders the thorough-paced scoundrel in a highly effective style." *(Daily Telegraph)*.

The interest and cast of *A Lancashire Lass* were strong enough to keep the play on the boards till the end of the year, and in 1869, after a short holiday, *Dearer than Life* was taken up again—"an excellent little drama" as the *Saturday Review* called it—in which Irving played as before. On February 13th, *Not Guilty*, a new play by Watts Phillips, was produced. To Mr.

Irving was assigned the part of Robert Arnold, an *incompris* and innocent locksmith who is convicted for a theft he has not committed, and at last triumphantly vindicated. "Mr. Irving, who is here directed into more virtuous paths than those he has lately trodden on the stage, seems scarcely yet reconciled to the utterance of noble sentiments; but his impersonation of Robert Arnold is marked by all his wonted earnestness and discrimination." It ran for about six weeks, with the *Spitalfields Weaver*, a small play in which Mr. Irving also had a part.

On the occasion of his benefit, March 19th, 1869, Mr. Irving came before the London public in a new rôle. He had acted a few days previously in *She Stoops to Conquer* for Mr. Lionel Blough, and the company now returned the compliment by supporting him in *Plot and Passion*, in which he acted de Neuville. When the Queen's closed, Mr. Blough, Mr. J. L. Toole, and Mr. Irving took *Dearer than Life*, bodily so to speak, to the Standard Theatre, an unfashionable house in a poor part of London where the audiences make up by enthusiasm for the absence of refinement. But they are sympathetic to play to, especially in pieces which appeal to their moral sense of domestic virtue, and *Oliver Twist, Dot*, (an adapta-

tion of *The Cricket on the Hearth*, by C. Dickens)—in which Irving played Peerybingle, and small pieces were acted there throughout the spring season of 1869, till early in May.

In June the company went to the Surrey, another large and strictly ungenteel theatre, where Mr. Irving played Robert Macaire for his benefit, July 6th. From July 12th, Mr. Irving played for three weeks at the Haymarket, opened by Miss Amy Sedgwick for a sort of supplementary season to produce *All for Money*, written by Miss Le Thière. "Mr. Henry Irving," says the *Daily Telegraph*, "as the grasping dissolute captain Fitzhubert, gives us a graphic picture of a specious selfish rogue of advanced years, who throughout his life has made the world his prey."

In August Mr. Irving again "created" a part (played it, that is to say, for the first time) in a new play by Boucicault: Compton Kew in *Formosa* at Drury Lane; once more "a plausible villain," and he remained at this famous old house till the pantomime was put on for the Christmas holidays when he rejoined his friend and ally Mr. Toole at the Gaiety, to play Mr. Chevenix, a part in *Uncle Dick's Darling*, "with great care." The play was well cast and had a good run till April, 1870.

Alfred Skimmington was his next part, in *For Love or Money*, a comedy with which Messrs. Montague, James, and Thorne opened the new Vaudeville Theatre in London, April 16th, 1870. This play had "no substantial character," it was however kept on the stage till the production of *The Two Roses*, a really capital comedy by Albery, which was at once made famous by the acting of Messrs. Irving, James, and Honey. "The pretentious humbug Digby Grant is portrayed by Mr. H. Irving with all the touches of a finished artist whose long practice has enabled him to give a vivid coloring to portraitures of this description. This latest embodiment is singularly perfect." *(Daily Telegraph)*. "The selfish arrogance, the stuck-up *hauteur*, the transparent hypocrisy, and the utter heartlessness of the character, made all the more odious from the assumption of sanctity, were depicted by Mr. Irving with exquisite truthfulness of detail, and admirable brilliancy and vigor of effect. His make-up for the part was excellent, and his whole performance spirited, characteristic, and life-like." *(Morning Post)*.

"The actor's first great part in London," wrote Mr. Frederick Wedmore some years later, "fitted Mr. Irving exactly, for while it displayed his merits it concealed his defects. The needy

proud man was forever posing, forever playing a part; and not till Mr. Irving had passed from this part into some other, did we perceive what his own difficulty was in being quite natural." This is to a great extent true, nevertheless:

"Digby Grant as presented by Mr. Irving deserves to rank as a creation, and as a picture of self-satisfied, vaporous meanness; the performance is admirable." *(Athenæum).*

"Mr. Irving's Digby Grant is a figure of *genre*, profoundly understood and perfectly executed, and * * his extraordinarily powerful study of a typical blackguard of society makes other studies seem weaker than they really are. * * The Digby Grant of the *Two Roses* has the finish, the expressiveness, and the clearness of a Meissonnier. The satire of the play is masculine, and so is its emotion, though that does not happen to accord with the passing fashion for the languid, and the momentary preference for the indifferent and limp." *(Academy,* on the revival, December, 1881).

This play, which was most successful and has been since revived more than once, kept the stage with the original cast till the middle of May, 1871, when the management changed hands, Mr. Montague seceding, and Mr. Irving played there no

more; he has occasionally acted the part since for benefits, and revived it for awhile in December, 1881.

The *top wave* however of Mr. Irving's tide of fortune may be said to have been that which landed him in the Lyceum Theatre in 1871. The late Mr. H. L. Bateman (formerly of this city) was the manager. "To Mr. Bateman," says the *Saturday Review*, "belongs the credit of reviving a genuine taste for Shakespeare in the London public;" but it remarks, and very justly, that he was primarily guilty of introducing into England a system of puffing advertisement which had already for some time been customary,—and not let us add, altogether creditable to our taste,—on this side of the Atlantic, whence Mr. Bateman imported it. Mr. Bateman certainly did from the earliest days of his management, show this tendency towards puffing advertisement; but as his prosperity was better assured on the one hand,—and as, on the other, he was far out-crowed by others on his own midden,—this weakness became less conspicuous and objectionable, and at any rate he always had the credit of keeping his self-laudatory promises.

The first part that Irving played on a stage which has since been the scene of many suc-

cesses, — more or less qualified, no doubt, by adverse criticism, — of some genuine triumphs and of very few failures, in the pecuniary sense at any rate, was that of Landry in a play called *Fanchette*, adapted from a German piece, *Die Grille*, which Charlotte Birch, had originally arranged for the stage from George Sand's delightful little novel *La petite Fadette*. In this piece Miss Isabel Bateman, the manager's third daughter, made a very successful début, and Mr. Irving "gave value to Landry Barbeau, her lover, by his earnest and impressive manner."

This was on the 11th of September. On the 22d of October, an arrangement for the stage of scenes from Pickwick, by Mr. Albery, gave Mr. Irving an opening in the farcical part of Jingle. "It was really sad to see such actors as Mr. Irving, Mr. Addison, and Mr. Belmore, wasting themselves on such a play," though "in make-up Mr. Irving was Jingle to the life." *(Daily Telegraph)*. "The full excellence of his acting was more than usually distinguishable. His grotesque shabby-genteel appearance, — the dignified serenity with which he pursued his ulterior aims, — his imperturbable impudence and unblushing confidence thoroughly deserved the applause he received. The little touch of sentiment in which

Jingle acknowledges the merits of Mr. Pickwick deserves special mention." In spite of just strictures on the total absence of constructive skill in the piece itself of course it had a good run. For one thing, it was the fashion in those days to rank Dickens as next only to Shakespeare; a strong cast kept it going till *The Bells* was produced. Then, when Pickwick was revived as an afterpiece, Jingle was played by Mr. Gaston Murray till it was replaced by *Raising the Wind*, with Mr. Irving as Jeremy Diddler.

Mr. Bateman, of course, saw that he had taken a prize, and it was in behalf of Mr. Irving's acting and his own management that he first set the example of printing as an advertisement extracts from the criticisms in the newspapers. It was a masterly stroke in its way. When the visitor in need of amusement glances down the list of theatres to find an answer to the question: "Where shall we go?" a long array of laudatory paragraphs, with all adverse criticism carefully eliminated, catches his eye and cannot fail to prove attractive.

It was in *The Bells*—a tragical melodrama as we may call it—that Henry Irving achieved his first great and original success. In this he may really be said to have *created* a part in a far wider

and higher sense than is commonly understood by that misused word.

Le Juif Polonais, a very powerful and concentrated story by MM. Erckmann-Chatrian was dramatized into a no less powerful, though certainly "one-part" play by Mr. Leopold Lewis. Whether Mr. Lewis had taken a singularly judicious and sympathetic measure of the actor and wrote for him; or whether Mr. Irving understood what a magnificent opening the play would afford his particular vein of "eccentricity" the present writer knows not—nor is it important. The actor and the part are literally "hand and glove," and, in its way, Mr. Irving's performance of Mathias in *The Bells*—so the play was named—is a masterpiece of art. It had a run of many weeks and fairly took the town by storm. There can be no better proof of the amazing force and poetry of Mr. Irving's conception of the character of Mathias than the way in which his audiences lent him the aid of their own imagination in investing it with terrors which it is not too much to say that no play could dramatically display, and no actor represent with any artistic fitness. People went to see *The Bells* primed with horror, wound up to an acute pitch of sympathetic prepossession, and from first to last there was not—there is not,

for it is as fine a piece of art as ever it was — a flaw, not a discord to cheat the spectators out of the fulfilment of their expectation. Every anticipation was fulfilled, and they went home saying the play had "made their flesh creep," "that they should dream of it for nights after." In truth the horrors of the story are quite inadequate to account for such a state of feeling, and in Mr. Irving's performance some of the most admirable moments are subtly blended with a most delicate vein of humor, particularly in the scene with Christian in the second act where he defies his friend's penetration with a cool half-whimsical audacity.

The Bells is therefore one of the signal instances of what is Mr. Irving's most characteristic quality: his personal influence over his audience. The whole of the play from first to last is in his hands, the love interest being of secondary importance, and his power and finish are equally amazing. In the *tête-à-tête* with Christian especially not a touch is wanting.

The Saturday Review, one of the best conducted of high-class London journals, had for many years steadily ignored Mr. Irving's efforts, or alluded to them with the patronizing praise that might be given to a beginner. When the

Two Roses was produced it spoke well of the play and said it was "well acted," but made no special mention of Digby Grant. However, when he played Mathias there was no doubt of his having made his mark; it was no longer possible to overlook him. However much his method might displease the adherents of the classical school, Mr. Irving had become a fact to be dealt with on his own merits. "According to the Manager's advertisement," said *The Saturday Review*, "there was a 'startling unanimity,' among the critics in praising the performance. We fully admit that the praise was deserved; but the really startling thing would have been to find a human creature, critical or other, who desired to see the performance a second time. Happily there are many rich communities in which English actors may ply their calling, and if it is admitted that everybody ought to see any play once the fortune of all concerned in it is tolerably well secured. Thus much we can certainly say on behalf both of Mr. Irving and Miss Bateman (in Leah and Medea); but in neither case should we expect that increase of appetite should grow by indulgence. As the Frenchman said of fox-hunting 'I have been.'" *The Saturday Review* is now a convert, and like all converts, a zealot. "A strangely fascinating

piece of acting is this impersonation throughout," is what it says of Mathias in 1880; "Increased art and experience have tempered impulse with strongly-marked improvement" since 1872.

It was in April, 1872, that the farce of *Raising the Wind* was revived for Mr. Irving to take the part of Jeremy Diddler. The flippant, self-sufficient, shifty adventurer was amusingly represented; but such a *rôle* is in no respect calculated to do the actor justice, and to tell the truth his farcical importance was somewhat over done; as an acute and experienced critic observed: "he played it no better than any one else would have done"—in truth the final cause of a Nasmyth hammer is not to crack nuts, for all that it cracks them so neatly. However it served to display his agile versatility: "Mr. Irving's triumph is great. At one moment as Mathias he keeps his audience spellbound by the terrible picture he presents to them of a conscience-stricken murderer, and the next excites uproarious laughter by his ingenious devices as the gay and gifted Jeremy." (*Athenaeum*, April, 1872).

After playing Mathias one hundred and fifty nights Mr. Irving took a benefit on the hundred and fifty-first, May 14, 1872, and left town for a time.

His next great part was that of Charles I.

in a play, so named, by W. G. Wills. The pathos of the situations was very strong, especially in the last act; and this, added to Mr. Irving's elegant and dignified aspect, served to plunge the audience into a luxury of woe, which tempted crowded houses to see it, both then, and later when it was revived. His make-up was so like the portraits of the King that it might have been one of them endowed with life and speech. "Through Charles I. runs a melancholy beauty which finds expression in many musical passages, and which intensifies as the play proceeds into absolute pain. During the last act there was hardly a dry eye in the house. Women sobbed openly, and even men showed an emotion which comported ill with the habitual serenity of the stalls. Much of this uncomfortable gratification was due to the acting of Mr. Irving, the hero of the play. * * * Nothing more regal can be desired than his bearing, nothing more harmonious than the effect of every look and gesture, nothing more touching than his delivery of the poetic beauties that abound. From the outward appearance of the King down to each little detail of posture everything is elaborated with conscientious care, and the result is a vivid creation of art." *(Daily News).*

"*Étude dramatique*," the words used by MM. Erckmann-Chatrian to qualify *Le Juif Polonais*, might with advantage have been employed to characterize this work. "Dramatically speaking the play is above the average work of the kind that we have met with for some years. The character of Oliver Cromwell, it is true, would have proved a better foil to Charles had he seemed a worthier foe. In the scenes where they are brought face to face, admiration is claimed for the King and contempt for his rival. * * The situation at the close of the third act, where Cromwell's soldiers are faced by the gentlemen from the Temple and Lincoln's Inn, has genuine dramatic fire. In general the interpretation of the part by Mr. Irving was excellent. Seldom, indeed, of late has a piece of equally fine acting been seen on the London stage. It is satisfactory to find an actor who can wear a court suit and look a gentleman.—Mr. Irving did more; he realized fully the conception of his author."

The *Saturday Review* dealt very severely with *Charles I.* as a historical play. "It seems," says the critic, "to have occurred to some artist in theatrical costume that Mr. Irving might be made up into a tolerable imitation of the portraits of Charles I. * * It is to be feared that the his-

torian of Cromwell (the author of *Sartor Resartus*) might pronounce the drama of *Charles I.* a mere affair of clothes. * * Nevertheless author and actor are entitled to the credit of having achieved a very considerable success by means which may be fairly called legitimate." And when the play was revived a few years later the same journal goes on to say that: "Mr. Irving performs a remarkable feat in giving interest to the puerile and monstrous scene between Charles and Cromwell,—a scene in which the two most prominent figures of the time are perhaps more grossly misrepresented than they have ever been before, even in history." Mr. Irving's acting alone could have carried this piece through, the poetry, grace, and dignity with which he performed the part of the King "suggests," says the *Daily Telegraph*, "a mind and character which may be false to history but which are nevertheless very interesting and beautiful!" "In asking whether the play is good or bad we presume the public means is it worth going to see, and this may be immediately answered in the affirmative though the effect on the audience is, no doubt, depressing." Miss Isabel Bateman was careful, graceful, sweet, pathetic,—but not equal to the part which Miss Terry now fills with so much womanly pathos and queenly dignity.

This play kept the stage for nearly seven months and was succeeded in April, 1873, by another work by W. G. Wills: *Eugene Aram.* The part for Mr. Irving was one of those in which almost the whole responsibility of the play rested on him; and here again it was in the passages where passion carried him above and beyond the real scene around him that he rose to the greatest height. In Mathias he had shown us terror, in Eugene Aram he is a prey to despair,—despair at bay in the scene where he defies his persecutor Houseman; despair, broken-hearted when he dies after confessing his crime to his betrothed. "It is not easy to see what can have commended the story of Eugene Aram to Mr. Wills for dramatic purposes. It is, of course possible to elevate to importance almost any materials or subject whatever. But Eugene Aram's crime was commonplace and repellent, and the only process by which it can be invested with force, dignity, or interest is, in fact, that which Mr. Wills has adopted, a complete departure from the facts." "Mr. Irving has conceived the character and situation of Aram with elaborate care and great power." (*Daily Telegraph*). "Commencing quietly in the first act, Mr. Irving rises to a marvellous exhibition of power in the second, and ends in the third by the

wildest exaggeration and extravagance. What service he might render to the stage is shown by his splendid defiance of his enemy in the second act and his adjuration at the commencement of the third. If in these things Mr. Irving goes beyond most living English actors, it is lamentable to see that he subsequently falls into excesses wholly unpardonable. He is insensible to the virtue of repose. Sensible that his power of facial play is remarkable he makes constant demands upon it, and his gesticulation passes far beyond the bounds of the permissible in art. This is the more deplorable as Mr. Irving's power and talent are both genuine. * * But the applause of ignorant crowds is terribly misleading. * * * The reception of the play was triumphant, and in spite of the almost sepulchral character of the interest, and in spite of—or perhaps by reason of—the faults of the actor, it will probably enjoy an extended popularity." We believe that riper judgment has much modified the errors of excess here pointed out. Mr. Irving has always liked the part, perhaps for the sake of the tender feeling and complex motive of the first act quite as much as for the painful display of the third. Some time before he acted the part we find that he had recited Hood's ballad at a reading for a

benefit, and we cannot but fancy that he must have had some share in suggesting those alterations in the story which lend it plot and pathos.

In the autumn of 1873 Irving once more took up a historical part. Lytton Bulwer's Richelieu was revived at the Lyceum and, as in Charles I., Irving engaged the interest of the public from the moment he appeared upon the stage, by the wonderful success of his whole "make-up" as the Cardinal; he had carefully studied the best portraits and his resemblance to the most famous of them (that by Philippe Champagne in the National Gallery, London) must strike any one who has seen it. In Richelieu some of the actor's favorite tricks and mannerisms are provokingly conspicuous,—for instance the rumpling of Francois' hair in the third act, where the stage direction is "*Patting his locks*," and the sudden and almost cynical descent to colloquial commonplace from really tragic heights,—but the conception of the part is nevertheless very grand; dignified and domineering, Irving in his robe of scarlet and lace looks taller than usual, as if he had grown to his eminence.

> "Richelieu is an Argus;
> "One of his hundred eyes will light upon us
> "And then,—good-bye to life."

Irving himself had spoken of him thus seventeen years before on the boards of an obscure provincial theatre (oddly enough also named the Lyceum) in the modest part of Orleans, and had, we may be sure, keenly watched, and no less keenly criticised, the performance of his chief, Mr. Davis of Sunderland, as the Cardinal. He had seen other and greater actors play it since, and as many men have acted it well it was perhaps a peculiar temptation to one whose confidence in his personality is so strong as Mr. Irving's to try how far a considerable infusion of it might tell in his presentment of the Cardinal. The natural consequence was that, though full of grand and impressive passages, it was undoubtedly marred by the bathos of which we have spoken. *The Saturday Review* spoke of it with excellent judgment, but it was once more "down" on Mr. Bateman. "The clever actor who has undertaken the part of Richelieu is supported by a manager skilled in the art of advertising. * * It is rather hard that we cannot bestow applause which is certainly well deserved, without being described as *endorsing a profound impression.* * * Perhaps we cannot better gauge the decline of the national theatre than by observing that Mr. Bateman, with his 'archaeological columns' has succeeded Mr.

Macready as the manager who produces Richelieu. The play was brought out in 1839 at Covent Garden, with Macready as the Cardinal. * * We have no fault to find with Mr. Irving's performance of Richelieu, nor do we think it calls for extravagant commendation. The curse of Rome, one of the finest passages in the play, has been selected for special laudation by Mr. Irving's critics, and all we have to say upon it is that Mr. Irving will do well not to strive too much for this kind of commendation. * * There is a straining after effect that is sometimes rather painful."

"Genuine interest," says Mr. Frederick Wedmore, a conscientious and judicious critic, "has been taken and will continue to be taken in this performance of Mr. Irving's at the Lyceum—a theatre to which people do not go so much with the questions: 'Is the play good? What of the *mise-en-scène?*'—for that is almost known beforehand—as with the enquiry how Mr. Irving has again acquitted himself. * * * I fear it is the tendency of Mr. Henry Irving to be a little spoilt by the indiscriminate applause of the groundlings, who are better judges whether a passion is violent than whether it is natural and appropriate. He shows no tendency to be spoilt in the vulgar way. With him nothing is slurred, nothing is careless;

he is as completely absorbed in his part and as completely devoted to it on the hundredth night of the performance as on the first. * * But he is perhaps inclined to pitch his performance in too high a key, or to break into a high key when there is no reason for it, — in a word he shows a tendency to exaggeration. No one should object to the horror of *The Bells*; the circumstances require it. No one has anything but praise for the pathos of *Charles the First* and the subtle rascality of *The Two Roses*; but in Eugene Aram he dies nine deaths,—his final release cannot possibly be a greater comfort to him than it is to ourselves,— and in Richelieu the outbreak of his rage is excessive" (this was written ten years since, when Mr. Irving's judgment was "greener" than it is now). "But fortunately there are two circumstances which do mark him out as a unique and illustrious artist. First, there are many moments when the high passion does not go wrong; and secondly, there are the longer and, of course more numerous, periods when, vehemence and excitement being out of the question, there is room for the uninterrupted display of sagacious judgment and serious thoughtful art. The touches of quiet art are very numerous and very admirable. A hundred touches go to make up this picture of

Richelieu, and I ask the spectator to notice particularly one subtle moment of gesture and expression when the Cardinal, having forgiven Mauprat and granted him the hand of Julie, cannot listen to his thanks. * * * Personal pleasure, personal good-will!—there is no room for these in Richelieu's life, when he is busied with a thousand affairs. It is by touches of character like this that an actor earns that title to greatness which, with all his failings, cannot, I think, be justly denied to Mr. Irving."

"The fact is," says *The Athenaeum*, "that, rightly or wrongly the public accepts Mr. Henry Irving as the coming actor, and attends with mingled curiosity and interest each successive manifestation of his powers. Very few performances have sufficed to elevate him to the position he now occupies; Mathias, Charles I., and Eugene Aram, are the only characters in which an opportunity of testing his powers has been afforded. Each impersonation however has been the subject of excited comment and criticism; and the spectacle, unusual in England, has been afforded of an artist going through a series of *débuts*. When Mr. Irving appeared as Richelieu excitement was at the height. * * Mr. Irving has much to qualify him for bearing off the prizes of the stage, and his

right to a position in the front rank of such actors as we have, cannot be contested. His figure is commanding; his face is expressive; his hands alone have more intelligence and power of expression than most of the so-called tragedians can impart to their entire face and figure; and his voice is deep and powerful, and capable of being charged with passion and pathos. Against these eminent advantages we have to rank as distinctly developed defects, a mannerism which augments with each successive impersonation and a tendency to rant. Few actors, however, are wholly free from mannerism; the propensity to rant is a more serious drawback. * * His Richelieu is splendidly picturesque * * but in the scenes which call for the display of passion Mr. Irving supplies its place with noise. Here is the blot. Passion is not loud. If we strike out from Mr. Irving's impersonation two scenes in which this violence reaches the climax, the whole extorts admiration." "The facts," says Mr. Wedmore, "that Mr. Irving in quiet moments is sometimes very artificial and that he carries into each part his own mannerism,—the measured step, the drawl, and in moments of excitement and passion, the high scream, which is terribly womanish,—should not blind us to the truth that all these faults are not the body of his

acting, but the morbid growth upon it. * * * It is the suggestiveness and thoughtfulness of his acting that make its real value and most lasting charm."

In July, 1875, when the piece was again put upon the stage, the same judicious critic tells us that "Mr. Irving's Richelieu is changed and bettered. We will not say he never raves, but he raves less. He brings the piece into accordance with his physical means, and it gains in dignity. * * It is a picture of many sides of Richelieu's life in his old age, which Lord Lytton outlines and Mr. Irving fills up; and it is the actor's admirable work that interests you entirely in the character."

We have given the critiques of the time on Irving's performance of Richelieu at somewhat greater length than may seem necessary, since the part of the Cardinal is not on the list of those he will act here. But it was the first part he played in which he provoked comparison with the great men gone before. Mathias, Charles I., and Eugene Aram, had been written for him and fitted to his powers with more or less success. His critics, as they watched him play Richelieu, thought of Macready, the first representative, Charles Kean, Phelps, and Vezin; and though, in some respects,

theirs may seem to have been negative merits where Irving's were brilliant mistakes, they may very reasonably have felt, — as we some of us still feel when we listen to Wagner, — a lurking preference for the trustworthy methods of an earlier phase of art.

The long extracts here given seem to us not only remarkably fair but judicious. The nine years of Mr. Irving's life since, have remedied certain of his defects and corrected some of his faults; his voice has gained in weight and so he has ceased to rant, and while he has lost a little in youth he has gained something in seriousness and style. The touch of character spoken of above has its parallel in a thousand others in every part he plays, his face, his hands, and his figure are as plastic as ever; but then the man himself, his qualities and his defects are also the same and the critiques written then are, with due abatement, equally valid now, alike for good and for evil.

On Saturday, February 7, 1874, a romantic drama was produced by Mr. Bateman, written by Mr. Hamilton Aidé, and called "Philip," in which Mr. Irving played the title part. The original story is to be found in Balzac's *Scènes de la Vie privée*, and is entitled La Grande Bretèche. Although the plot, strictly speaking, is brought to

naught and the play ends without bloodshed, it is still but a dismal legend to put upon the stage. It was however very ingeniously dealt with. Philip himself, the hero is a model of stage virtue, but for being inordinately jealous; his half-brother Juan is the incarnation of vice. Philip, to protect the girl they both love, from his brother's dishonorable suit, fires at Juan who falls shot, and, as Philip believes, mortally wounded. After eight years spent in gloomy remorse, Philip once more meets his early love and marries her; but in the third act Juan reappears, and renews his addresses to Marie under such critical circumstances that he has to take refuge in an oratory when Philip comes into his wife's room, and Philip, suspecting his wife of having concealed a lover, sends for a mason to brick up the entrance to it. However, before it is done he changes his mind, and follows the stranger pistols in hand. His indignation at finding him there is mitigated by his relief at discovering that his brother is still alive. He forgives him (what for ?) but very properly dismisses him from the premises. An uncomfortable doubt however lingers in the mind of the audience as to the genuineness of this display of magnanimity on Philip's part, since they see Juan packed off through a window where they happen to know

that a man has been posted with general orders to shoot any one he sees leaving the house.

Mr. Irving seems to have done well, nay wonders, with the inconsequent and incoherent character of Philip. "It stands forth," says the *Daily Telegraph*, "among this accomplished actor's finest creations." And the *Athenaeum* speaks of his interpretation as good throughout. *The Academy* makes this performance the occasion for a very discriminating comparison between the methods of Mr. Phelps — then playing Sir Anthony Absolute in *The Rivals* — a champion, as we may say, of the older school, and of Mr. Irving, the brilliant pioneer of a new one.

"Intellectual subtlety united with sobriety and a measured employment of the physical means,— that is perhaps the characteristic of the old school of acting of which Mr. Phelps has now for many years been the accredited representative. Intellectual subtlety, not seldom overshadowed by new and unaccustomed violence and passion,—that is perhaps the characteristic of the strenuous school of which Mr. Henry Irving is easily the chief. * * Mr. Phelps in *The Rivals*, Mr. Irving in *Philip*,— here is food for much curious consideration of the stage. Mr. Phelps, as is his wont, appears in a character which he has chiefly to interpret, and

Mr. Irving in a character he has chiefly to create. * * His inventive faculty is both great and delicate. His acting is always worthy of careful discussion, for if it is often disappointing it is oftener in the highest degree suggestive." The whole critique is too long to quote, especially as it bears upon a play which, so far as we know, Mr. Irving has never revived on any occasion — thereby showing his wisdom — but the little essay is full of judicious and appreciative criticism.

At the end of May *Philip* was taken off and *Charles I.* taken up again for three weeks. Of this revival we read that it was in many respects an improvement on the first production, the minor parts being better filled. Mr. Wedmore writes: "A wonderful subtlety of expression and gesture accompanies the recital of the ballad in *Charles I.;* he repeats it to his children who like the story of it, and shows you very plainly that it is not at all in his thoughts. It is in quieter moments like these that we see most plainly that it is an artist who is at work; a man with whom voice and face and gesture are but instruments, and that the mind itself — the subtle intention — can alone give them their worth. Throughout this play Mr. Irving does many things that are worth remembering."

He certainly attains a purity of style which we do not remember to have felt so strongly in any other part we happen to have seen him in. He infuses a touch of the "divine right" into his scorn and anger, a calm marital dignity into his parting with the Queen which are very delicate touches of art; the romantic side of the drama is fully felt, but the reserve, etiquette and circumstance is duly indicated too. This complex suggestion is the great merit of the performance; and for the admirable intelligence and self-control it reveals we are disposed to rank it very high among Mr. Irving's efforts. It does not give an opening for that flame of passion—whether of love or fury—that he can flash forth at need, but as a sympathetic presentment of a man who is also a King it seems to us admirably conceived.

The last week of the Lyceum spring season was chiefly devoted to benefits. For his manager's benefit Mr. Irving played Mathias, and detached portions of *Philip* and of *Charles I.* at matinees, with *Raising the Wind* in the evening. At the end of the fashionable season at the Lyceum Mr. Irving and others of the company gave a series of performances at the Standard Theatre, a house at the east end of London and so completely of the ken of the West End that an actor

may "star" there with as much success as in the provincial towns. He then went to Liverpool, Manchester, Bristol, etc., with Miss Isabel Bateman, and the Lyceum reopened with *The Bells* in September.

Rarely in the history of the stage have expectation and curiosity been so much excited by any promised performance as they were by the announcement that Mr. Irving was preparing to act Hamlet at the Lyceum. The last Hamlet of any mark on the English stage had been Charles Fechter; the last of any fame Charles Kean. But Kean had retired from the London stage in 1859 (he died, 1868) while Irving was still working hard in the provinces, and it is possible that the young actor had never seen Kean whose Hamlet was characterized by the dry rasping utterance which must have thrown cold water on almost any passion and chilled the eagerest sympathy, in spite of the most intelligent reading and painstaking presentment. (Louis XI. was Charles Kean's greatest achievement). Mr. Irving tells us himself that "he never saw Macready in the part." (*Nineteenth Century*, February 1876). Fechter's Hamlet had found warm admirers; it was clever and singular, but it is no disrespect to that delightful actor of sentimental and romantic parts to

say that its abstractions were outside if not beyond his powers. Two American actors had also played Hamlet in England, Mr. Wallack and Mr. G. V. Brooke, but under unfavorable circumstances—indifferently supported perhaps—at any rate they achieved no particular success.

The play, or to be accurate, the part, of Hamlet must have some subtle affinities with the English character. The morbid conscientiousness, the possession by an idea, a mania for redressing a definite wrong are, of course, characteristic of a lofty and acutely sensitive nature, of whatever race; but there is something essentially Teutonic in the questioning spirit which complicates every moral decision in Hamlet's mind, and which "reasons of the judgment to come" in the very crisis of volition when "to be or not to be" must seal the fate of souls as well as bodies. The English public is never tired of seeing Hamlet, and with all its reverence for Shakespeare listens with more than patience to every new reading which may suggest some possible new answer to the problems of life and mind which Hamlet, like the rest of us, could only see and never solve. The part of Hamlet is an abstract of one side of human nature for all ages, and the London public wanted—perhaps with but a vague consciousness

of what it wanted—such a Man of his Time as Irving undoubtedly is, to assimilate its essence and then reproduce it as the interpretation of the spirit of their own age. "Mr. Irving's admirers felt that his Hamlet would be the true one," says the *Daily Telegraph;* and they were so far right that for them, for us, it is. "Some, who have seen other Hamlets are aghast: 'Mr. Irving is missing his points and neglecting his opportunities: Betterton's face turned white when he saw the ghost, Garrick thrilled the house as he followed him'—but by the end of the first act all are spellbound. The second act finishes with the same result. Mr. Irving's intention is not to make to points but to give a consistent reading of a Hamlet who thinks aloud. The Hamlet he presents to us may be rejected by some * * but many will not only accept his interpretation, but will feel that they are brought in close connection with the Hamlet Shakespeare knew." "The originality of the conception is at first startling, especially to that army of old play-goers whose ideas have been marshalled into order and arranged by the actors of their youth." *(Times).*

The play-goers of the younger generation could not fail by this time to discern in Irving an actor, and a thinker, who might, if ever man could,

make those "sweet bells" ring in harmony, though never in unison, which to Ophelia's narrower intelligence only "jangled out of tune." This, in fact, was what Henry Irving did — other actors have played Hamlet before him and others will play it again; but in each age, as the times change, the actor who understands, as Irving has done, the pure and adaptable human essence of Hamlet's nature will not merely *succeed* but will be one of the high-priest's of his age, speaking both for and to the people. This sounds rhapsodical and it is meant as the highest praise; at the same time it does not exclude criticism as to the execution of what is so nobly and broadly conceived. The details of Mr. Irving's acting are always strangely and subtly aggravating. He reminds us, even in Hamlet, of only too many modern artists who, painters though they be, cannot paint. The eccentricities of his pronunciation put his blank verse out of tune, and pauses where they cannot commend themselves to our common sense dislocate his meaning into something only too like nonsense.

The Athenæum, in speaking of this performance, puts forward the rather paradoxical opinion that in spite of the length of the part, "the longest in the acted drama," there is not one "more difficult and

thankless," and "that so long as every scholar throughout civilization retains an individual conception of Hamlet, the actor who undertakes to present it will always encounter exceptional risks." "Of all Shakespeare's great plays *Hamlet* belongs most distinctly to the closet." But we venture to think that this is not only paradoxical but the converse of the truth. It is because it is the most read — as it very probably is — that the public are always ready to listen to a new reading; and it is not too much to say that it is actually because the other great plays are less read in private, because the individual play-goer has not so completely *envisagé* the other great parts, that the curiosity and interest they excite is less eager. *The Athenaeum* critic however expresses himself satisfied with Mr. Irving's reading. "It is interesting and intellectual in an eminent degree. The character has been studied with care and intelligence and the conception throughout is elevated and sustained. As no event has created more profound interest, no audience at any previous representation in recent times has been more capable and more critical. Slowly and reluctantly it came under the spell of the conception, and at the close of the third act was riveted in a way such as we read of in records of past performances, but

scarcely—so far as English acting is concerned—can recall. The performance is noteworthy as marking a stage in the history of theatrical art, since it shows the final abandonment of old traditions of acting, and of conventions of declamation. The performance is revolutionary,—but he makes no change for the sake of change: his new business is occasionally unimportant; it is generally, however, significant, even when we think it is wrong."

Mr. Frederick Wedmore deals with the performance with his usual—nay unfailing, perception and appreciation of its beauties and its faults; but his essays are too long to reproduce at full length and too complete to cut with any justice. The reader who wants a critic's sympathy in judging of this great achievement will find them in the *Academy*, literary journal. (London, November 7 and 14, and December 12, 1874). "The whole performance," he ends, "may be summarized by saying that Mr. Irving's interpretation, notwithstanding a few errors, is vigorous, graceful, thoughtful, and sagacious beyond contemporary experience. It is a picture touched not rarely by the light of undeniable genius."

The Spectator too praised it with much discretion. "Mr. Irving can still be stilted and not un-

frequently hard; but the gain of these few years (from 1871 to 1874) has been so marvellous that we do not know what more he may not gain; he may easily reach — for he is yet young, even the highest point attainable in his art. In a few of the most difficult scenes his Hamlet is all but perfect. He has the power in him to make it so in all."

The Saturday Review (December 19, 1874,) compared Messrs. Creswick and Irving in Hamlet, "not to Mr. Creswick's disadvantage. So much nonsense, to speak plainly, has been written about Mr. Irving that people will hear with surprise that there is another actor, who, in his great part, is not so very far behind him." It admits, however, what is unfortunately only too true, that Mr. Creswick looked old for the part, and added that "his Hamlet was more stagey while Mr. Irving shows more independent study." "It is satisfactory," the same paper remarks, "to observe the care and completeness with which the performance has been undertaken. We do not in the least undervalue the conscientious study which Mr. Irving has given to this part; but we may venture to remark that it is not exactly what Shakespeare thought most desirable in an actor. Emotional talent is a more precious gift than any result that can be worked out by study. We by no means say that



MISS ELLEN TERRY AS "OPHELIA."

Mr. Irving does not possess this faculty of feeling the part he undertakes, but we observe that his admirers dwell emphatically on other faculties which do not alone make a first-rate actor. Nevertheless he has attained a considerable success and there can be no question that his Hamlet is well worth seeing."

We recommend the real play-goer—the play-goer whose enjoyment is at once sympathetic and critical—to see *Hamlet* twice. Once, that is to say, to see Hamlet, and once to see Ophelia. We, who have seen many Hamlets have suffered under many Ophelias—the stagey Ophelia, the whining Ophelia, the feebly raving Ophelia. But Miss Terry is the Ophelia beloved of Hamlet the prince, the ideal maiden of Hamlet the philosopher. It is a consummate piece of acting in more ways than one, and not least in this: that she makes Ophelia of due importance and the heroine of the love interest—which we never saw any other Ophelia do—and yet pitches her individuality in a gentle key which gives consistency to the character as a whole, and duly subordinates it to the main current of the tragedy. Besides this she has beauty and grace; though, to tell the truth, her appearance more exactly befits Portia and Desdemona.

At the close of this season on the 3d of July, Mr. Irving gave a reading at the Crystal Palace, selecting scenes from *Hamlet* and *Othello* as well as some short pieces; he had previously given a similar entertainment in aid of a London hospital, with a rather more varied selection, and an audience, of the class usually too genteel to applaud, were fairly roused to enthusiasm and laughter.

On March 22d, 1875, Mr. Bateman died suddenly; this was regarded as an almost irreparable loss by all play-goers who understood the responsibilities and difficulties of a manager's functions. "Who is to succeed him?" asked *The Saturday Review* suddenly awakened to a sense of his managerial powers. "The prosperity and popularity of Mr. Bateman and his family in England, are a gratifying set-off to the many successes of English actors in America." We confess that as we remember Booth, Charlotte Cushman, and Joseph Jefferson, not to mention Herman Vezin, who has made England his home, we should have thought the score fairly balanced already. His widow now took up the reins of government; Mr. Irving was faithful to the theatre where he had won his greatest triumphs, and Miss Kate Bateman (Mrs. Crowe) came to reinforce the company.

It was with her, at the end of September that Mr. Irving first played Macbeth. Very few play-goers looked forward at all hopefully to his presentment of the ambitious Thane and, on the whole, their doubts and fears were fully justified. Some of his critics, it is true, maintained that the actual performance of certain passages was admirable: "The final combat and death struggle have probably never been equalled for picturesque force and intensity." *(Daily News)*. However, opinions differed as to his success. The *Athenaeum* pronounced that though there was "intention in Mr. Irving's conception it was wrong" and Mr. Sheridan Knowles, in a careful and well-considered study of Irving's Macbeth, comes to very much the same conclusion and the analysis he gives of the play fully warrants him in his verdict.

"That Mr. Irving's representation of the ambitious Thane has many strong points we have already acknowledged; and if we cannot call them redeeming points, it is because he utterly fails to realize that marvellous balance of character and situation which Shakespeare has so finely elaborated."*

The tragedy was carefully prepared and mag-

* Sheridan Knowles' conception and Mr. Irving's performance of Macbeth. London, Effingham Wilson, 1876.

nificently put upon the stage. "We do not suppose the oldest play-goer in the house can remember the play of *Macbeth* to have begun more admirably. The weird effects, almost too daring for representation, were on this occasion crowned with signal success. The marvellous mystery—which has been known to provoke laughter—here inspired awe. The three sisters are indeed black and midnight hags, and as they patter round their cauldron, revealed by an occasional lightning flash, the very gloom and horror which Shakespeare wished to throw over his tragedy are felt by the audience. * * But before the second scene is over they cannot quite grasp Mr. Irving's idea of Macbeth. * * In facial expression he is even better than ever; once more his face is an index to his mind, his attitudes eloquent with expression and meaning. * * Why then should there be any hesitation in accepting Mr. Irving's Macbeth, and why does a feeling of disappointment arise? The fact is that we are conscious of what the actor means, and are confident of the care devoted to the study, but we see with alarm that he is unable thoroughly to carry out his ideas. To make matters worse his manner is occasionally so dreamy and his voice so lowered that the text cannot be heard." The *Daily Telegraph* was very

severe on the whole performance. "The thought and culture devoted to the part of Macbeth"—it ended—"by the young student actor (Mr. Irving was then seven and thirty, but he had been only nine years on the London stage) deserved no doubt a happier fate; but no great actor has ever succeeded well in all the Shakespearian characters he has assumed. Many indeed, like Mr. Irving have not been gifted with the physical strength or robust vigor necessary for the trying demands of a tragedy like Macbeth."

Hamlet was revived for a short time during the winter and meanwhile Mr. Irving was nursing a still loftier ambition.

Though Macbeth was no doubt to a certain extent a failure in art, and a success only in so far as curiosity filled the house, it held the stage nearly six months, and then Mr. Irving nothing daunted flew at the highest mark that an English, or any other, actor can ever hope to reach. In February, 1876, he attempted to play Othello. It is hardly disrespectful to say so markedly *attempted;* Edmund Kean is said to have played Othello before the time of most living play-goers, and an Italian actor performed it with extraordinary power and success not long since in Italian. At the same time it remains doubtful to

this day whether any analysis of average men, or synthesis arrived at even by the most perfervid spirit, can result in a satisfactory presentment of the Moor—it is perhaps the one part which a 'noble savage' might seize, master, and then hurl at an audience with a success never to be achieved by the student. But we most of us feel, with the Preacher, that "a living dog is better than a dead lion" and take Edmund Kean on trust as becomes us when our elders speak; and it is quite certain that we apply to a foreigner far less subtle and searching tests of quality than we do to an actor who speaks our mother tongue. Grace, force, dignity, and facial expression are of course the language of all mankind; but delicate beauties are undoubtedly lost unless we have a very good knowledge of the actor's tongue, and subtle faults also escape our notice. Some of the most annoying defects in Mr. Irving's elocution would no doubt remain concealed if we heard them in Italian, so it is not impossible that Signor Salvini's talent, great as it is, has been overrated a little. On the other hand it is impossible to be satisfied with Irving's Othello. "There can be but one true Othello," said the *Times* (February 17th, 1876), and a jerky, fidgety, undignified Othello is not he. Othello's jealous suspicion is a slow,

boa-constrictor-like demon, irresistible, unrelenting to the death. The passion to which it tortures him is the death-struggle of its victim. The whole scheme of the story is not so much the history of the man — though we do get to know a good deal of that too — as the evolution of that passion. The synthesis is not complex, it is compounded of few elements but their combination results in flame, explosion, and ruin. Irving's conception of it was not sufficiently grandiose. A defect which often mars his art in this was curiously conspicuous; he did not seem to have considered duly the bearings of his own individuality as it might affect the other persons in the drama. The first thing we ask of the actor who plays Othello is that it should seem possible that Desdemona should love him. Of whatever shade of blackness he chooses to paint himself he must stand a "lord of creation," self-respecting, masterful, and heroic; otherwise the weakest Desdemona could not love him for "the perils he had known." The least shade of fractiousness or smallness in him mars our sympathy with her. On the other hand we must not feel as if mere easy-going good-nature had made him fall a prey, in the first instance, to Iago's villany; it is a really sublime modesty which is the soil in which the ancient sows the seed.

That all this is difficult or even impossible to render may be granted; the alternative is to grasp only the broader effects, the high lights of the picture and never to fritter them away with spots and patches of color. Irving's Iago—which he did not play till some years later—was not altogether free from blemish of the same kind; the whole mass of the character, however, naturally suffered less and his conception of it was admirably rendered and perfectly satisfactory in its relations to Othello. Not quite so as regards Desdemona, with whom we can hardly believe that Iago would have ventured on any freedom of manner though he mocks at her creed of virtue. To this however we shall return in due course.

The critique on Othello in *The Saturday Review* when Irving first acted it was unusually full and conscientious. We find it saying in fact much what we have said here: "His awkward gait and unpleasant voice detract from the impressiveness of his first entrance and when the Duke says: 'I think this tale would win my daughter too,' we can only say that we do not think so. * * He has vicious habits which have been confirmed by success and popularity. * * Mr. Irving has always shown an intelligent disregard for stage traditions, but unhappily he has created for himself—or

others have created for him—a standard of intensity which is almost equally pernicious."

"Mr. Irving's Othello fails to impress on the audience the ingrained nobility of the character, and it almost necessarily follows that he is unsuccessful in the effort to carry their sympathies with him. Before the curtain rose upon the bed-chamber scene it had been felt that no sufficient foundation had been laid for sympathy with the tragic fate of Desdemona (played then by Miss Isabel Bateman) or the overwhelming misery of the Moor." (F. Wedmore in *The Academy*).

In April, 1876, the Lyceum became the scene of an interesting experiment on the part of Alfred Tennyson (poet Laureate of England), who for the first time wrote a drama for stage purposes on the history of "Queen Mary." Miss Bateman (Mrs. Crowe), filled the title part, and Mr. Irving played that of King Philip of Spain. The play was only moderately praised but Irving undoubtedly added a leaf to his crown. It was a highly-finished piece of "character acting." The Spanish King's rigid haughtiness, suspicious alertness, and cold concentration of selfish purpose were broadly and clearly rendered. Here again he "made up" from well-known pictures, but we do not remember to have seen a photograph of him in the part. In dealing

with the play of *Queen Mary* of course the task of the critics was to dissect the piece quite as much as to discuss the actors. "Mr. Irving and Miss Bateman," says *The Saturday Review*, "did all that was possible for the principal parts, as the manager did for the play generally. * * Respect is due even to misdirected art. The manager has undertaken to supply the want of a national theatre in producing this play as a sort of tribute to literary eminence, and failure properly evokes sympathy. But failure beyond a doubt there was." Mr. Irving could only make the best of an ungracious and ungrateful part, and a plain, sickly, unlovable woman cannot make a satisfactory heroine though she be a queen. "The sorrows of wretched wives, too, pall upon the public, and it is certainly not a frivolous amusement to sit through such a play as *Queen Mary*."

In June, 1876, Mr. Irving played Joseph Surface at Drury Lane for Mr. Buckstone's benefit and within a fortnight took his own, after playing Doricourt for that of Miss Isabel Bateman. Lady Martin (the well-known actress Helen Faucit) who has not unfrequently emerged from private life to perform some such act of graciousness or charity, played for Mr. Irving's benefit, "and both he and the manager," says *The Saturday Review*, "de-

serve the compliment." The part she selected was that of the blind princess in *King René's Daughter*, her husband's version of the Swedish play which afterwards furnished Mr. Wills with the *motif* for *Iolanthe*, in which Miss Ellen Terry achieved so much success. Mr. Irving acted Count Tristan.

The Lyceum company, with Mr. Irving at their head, then made a tour through the provinces and did not reappear in London till January, 1877, when the Lyceum reopened with Richard III. Mr. Irving's impersonation of the crook-backed Duke of Gloucester is, first and last, one of the best things he has ever done. In spite of a well-affected deformity he wears an air of chivalrous grace which well becomes a descendant of the Plantagenets. "Brilliant, energetic, impassioned," says one critic, and he was all these in the scene with the Lady Anne whom he wooes with a courtly fascination underneath which the bully is perceptibly lurking.

In February (3d), 1877, a very thoughtful article in *The Saturday Review* did full justice to Mr. Irving's claims to consideration as an artist, and spoke with sound judgment, whether we accept the verdict it pronounced or no. "On the whole," the writer ends, "Mr. Irving's is a performance

full of fine and fiery qualities;" and five weeks later he adds: "In several minor matters the actor has improved. The patience with which he keeps the meaning of the character fully in view of the audience, by means chiefly of by-play, without ever thrusting it in their faces, is admirable * * but there is a singular want of dignity and kingliness in his acting with the messengers who have just brought him in bad news."

The part of Richard III. is a strongly-marked example of Mr. Irving's best and worst points and most provoking peculiarities; but as it will not be played here it is unnecessary to enlarge upon it at any length. Though there is much to criticise at the end of the performance, the first act, as has already been said is full of beauties. "It may reasonably be questioned," says Mr. Caine, "if the contemporary stage have ever realized anything so absolutely finished in its tender, pathetic, sportive, and earnest aspects as the interview of Mr. Irving's Richard with Queen Anne—ending with its startling climax of withering satire."*

Mr Caine's pamphlet though very ill-written is full of thoughtful observation. He is "of opinion that Mr. Irving's delineations of the characters

* Richard III. and Macbeth; the spirit of romantic play. J. H. Caine, London, Simpkin & Marshall, 1877.

of Macbeth and Richard III., although histrionically harmonious in the highest degree, are wide of the truth in some leading particulars which the exercise of a certain guiding principle might have discovered."

It is interesting to find that the following year Mr. Irving, at a meeting to which he was invited, defended the views on which he had acted Macbeth at the Lyceum.

It was in May, 1877, that Mr. Irving came out in "The Lyons Mail," playing the two parts of Lesurques and Dubosc. This has always been regarded rather as a *tour de force* than as a piece of art and no doubt the mere trick, as a trick, is a clever one and cleverly performed; but what is far more remarkable is the solidity of the work Mr. Irving has bestowed on what is, after all, a decidedly sensational drama, with striking contrasts and strong situations but with little subtlety of character. Dubosc is a drunken ruffian, Lesurques the mildest of citizens; the real art of the actor consists more perhaps in keeping such a likeness as may excuse the mistake as to their identity, than in marking so trenchant a difference. But the drama is exciting and worth seeing if only to understand how wide Mr. Irving's intelligence is. Dubosc is, so far as we recollect the only

coarse and brutal part that Mr. Irving ever assumes.

"To exhibit all the difference between the two characters, and to exhibit it as if not merely a material but a psychological change was effected, is an object well worthy of a performer of Mr. Irving's powers. Nor does his performance fall far short of ideal excellence. The situation where Lesurque *père*, convinced of his son's guilt, urges him rather to kill himself than mount the scaffold — when the son is at one moment on the point of yielding but a nobler impulse induces him to cast the pistol from him — is exceedingly dramatic — Mr. Irving's fine shades of expression and terrible earnestness being aided in their effect by contrast with the grave inflexibility and sombre dignity of Mr. Meade as the father. The play affords a field for acting of the highest quality." *(Academy).*

The Saturday Review, however, did not speak very highly of the performance when it was first put on the stage. "There is nothing in the play that calls for praise of any kind except Mr. Irving's well-meaning, but not altogether happy, attempt to apply his great and peculiar talent to a performance which is hardly worth so much trouble." This was in June, 1877; but it is to

be presumed that the result to Mr. Irving was worth the trouble, since he has lately revived the play and elaborated his own parts with so much care that the performance is now no longer a *tour de force* but a phenomenon of character acting. In its first state (as we say of other works of art) it must have been distinctly overdone; it is evident however that the actor has liked playing it—perhaps the breadth of effect is a relief after the subtleties of Hamlet and Benedick—and he has added finish without losing vigor and contrast.

Louis XI. King of France was the next new part that Irving studied; he played it for the first time on March 9th, 1878. Charles Kean's success in this part was well remembered by most *habitués* of the London theatres. It had been the best of his parts, and it is now one of the best of Mr. Irving's. An English provincial paper published a discriminating comparison of the chief points of resemblance and contrast in the performances of Louis XI. by Charles Kean and Henry Irving (quoted at full length in *Pascoe's Dramatic List*, for 1880). The highly-intelligent writer prefers Irving, excepting in one passage—where the King begs to Nemours for his life. "It must be recorded" he says "that the last act is vastly

superior to anything that it entered into the mind of Charles Kean to effect."

The new play of *Louis XI.* was written in blank verse by Mr. Dion Boucicault, for Mr. Irving. "The character of the old King is eminently fitted to his genius. In the play it is, to be sure, but a flimsy piece of workmanship, and it is the actor's faculty of appealing to the imagination through his own imaginative power which renders this achievement distinctly greater than the late Mr. Charles Kean's famous performance * * he did not exercise the peculiar fascination which is felt by Mr. Irving's audiences. In expressive play of feature he is unrivalled. In Mr. Kean's hands the part was essentially melodramatic; as played by Mr. Irving it becomes invested with a terrible sort of ideality, and assumes far grander proportions than anything we are accustomed to associate with the name of melodrama."

At the same time, to gain any adequate idea of what Irving *can* do, this is by no means the best play to see him in. The 'make-up' is as good as possible, and the restless, mean gestures, the narrow movement and pinched vitality of a suspicious and miserly hypocrite are admirably rendered. But he has no opening for rising to a broader or more impassioned vein; the climax of

emotion is superstitious terror, his utmost expression of gladness is hardly more than a senile chuckle—of anger, a display of impotent fury. Those who can see Mr. Irving in more than one part will do well to see Louis XI.; those who can see him but once should select *Hamlet* if their tastes are classical, *The Bells* or *The Lyons Mail* if they crave after sensation. Another, quite different line of character was taken up by Mr. Irving in the summer of the same year, 1878: Vanderdecken in a new version of the well-known story of the *Flying Dutchman*. Of this again, the present writer cannot speak from personal experience. Irving must have looked uncommonly well in the part; a photograph done of him by Messrs. Vander Weyde of London is certainly the most flattering portrait that we have seen. The piece was not a success however; perhaps it was not intrinsically strong enough; and this seems probable when we reflect how monotonous the interest is and how simple a plot has been extended to four acts. In spite of capital scenery and careful mounting Vanderdecken was a failure. The play was feebly constructed and the prominence given to the spectral Dutchman was unduly great. What little charm the part derived from Mr. Irving's acting was due to his picturesque

appearance, and to a certain air of "majesty and command" in which he is able to wrap himself even in the most gloomy scenes and situations. The melodrama had a short life—impossible to call it a merry one—and was soon taken off and replaced by the adaptation from Pickwick called "Jingle." By this time however the London public had learnt that their favorite actor could do something more and better than amuse them.

The *résumé* of the part printed on the play-bills shows, however, that even in so light a part Irving took matters seriously and studied the frothy fidgety Jingle as a character—as a man—of far more substance than the original author, Charles Dickens, had endowed him with.

ALFRED JINGLE, ESQ.

JINGLE THE STROLLER.	JINGLE THE DANDY.
JINGLE THE LOVER.	JINGLE THE SWINDLER.
JINGLE THE FINANCIER	JINGLE THE PENITENT.

"The impersonation, however," says Mr. Pascoe, "was not of a kind to merit critical attention, and was possibly undertaken as a relief to Mr. Irving's more arduous duties."

CHAPTER III.

IRVING'S CAREER AS A MANAGER.

FROM the death of her husband in 1875 till the summer of 1878, Mrs. Bateman continued to be the responsible manager of the Lyceum Theatre, but the plays performed were put upon the stage under Mr. Irving's immediate direction and superintendence and no doubt the grave weight of responsibility to others, while it cannot be said to have fettered his enterprise must have been the source of considerable anxiety, though, at the same time, of much valuable experience. When, in September, 1878, Mrs. Bateman relinquished the management she was able, in her farewell address, to enumerate a goodly list of plays produced by her husband and herself during their seven years reign, a catalogue creditable alike to their own taste and their confidence in that of the public. In recording Mrs. Bateman's death in January, 1881, the *Theatre* adds a feeling tribute to her memory: "If ever a woman loved the art and worked for it with a man's energy and a high

purpose it was Mrs. Bateman. The good work she began at the Lyceum she intended to finish at Sadler's Wells, and just as she was beginning to see the promised fruit of all her industry she was cut off, to the unspeakable sorrow of her family * * Mrs. Bateman and her husband rest with us in old England, far away from the 'Maryland, my Maryland!' to which their hearts often turned in their exile." * * "They led the van," says the same periodical in 1878, "in revolutionizing the attitude of the thoughtful public towards the stage. * * Under ordinary circumstances it would have been a matter for profound regret that the management during whose time so much valuable work has been achieved should be in any way changed * * but no evil is likely to come of the transfer of the reins of management from the hands of Mrs. Bateman to those of Mr. Irving. Mr. Irving enters upon his task with the most ambitious motives, and with a past career and a present position which give the strongest indication of his power to accomplish his elevated purpose. The engagement of Miss Ellen Terry, who fairly heads the list of our emotional actresses, may legitimately be held to mean a great deal. Any work upon which artists of the calibre of Mr. Irving and Miss Terry simultaneously engage is

morally sure to be worthy of the utmost attention. If in other particulars the new Lyceum company can be strengthened after this fashion, we are assuredly on the high-road to the foundation of a school of dramatic art that will afford us both pleasure and pride."

It was on the 30th of December, 1878, that Mr. Irving first stood before the London public on the Lyceum stage, "monarch of all he surveyed." His play-bill which announced *Hamlet*, proclaimed him "sole lessee and manager," and when he appeared he was received with unbounded enthusiasm. The hopes of the public ran high for the future of the drama under his control. In the first place he had strengthened the cast in many ways, and conspicuously by securing the services of Miss Ellen Terry who has ever since been his worthy coadjutor in his work and whose gifts, it may be safely said, have enabled him to put plays on the stage which it would have been impossible to present with an inferior actress to second him. It is largely due to her talent in the female parts of Portia, Beatrice, and Pauline, that we have seen Irving as Shylock, Benedick, and Claude Melnotte. Miss Bateman (Mrs. Crowe) was too heavy an actress, her sister, Miss Isabel Bateman, too slight and ineffective to fill such

parts; and it is easy to imagine that it was with all the elation of freedom that Mr. Irving met his old friends and supporters, the London public. He addressed them briefly at the end of the evening in a vein of very justifiable satisfaction. "To produce the Hamlet of to-night," he said, "I have worked all my life, and I rejoice to think that my work has not been in vain." In truth he had triumphed that evening, for such an Ophelia had certainly not acted with such a Hamlet within the memory of man. "The support she afforded Mr. Irving was of the highest value." Of the younger actors who at that time found parts round Irving's Hamlet several have since risen to higher distinction. Mr. Kyrle Bellew, who played Osric, is a handsome and favorite *jeune premier*, and Mr. Pinero, who had previously acted with Mr. Irving in London and the provinces, has since distinguished himself not only as an actor but as an author.

During that season Mr. Irving revived all his most successful pieces and the new blood he had brought into the casts added greatly to his success as a manager.

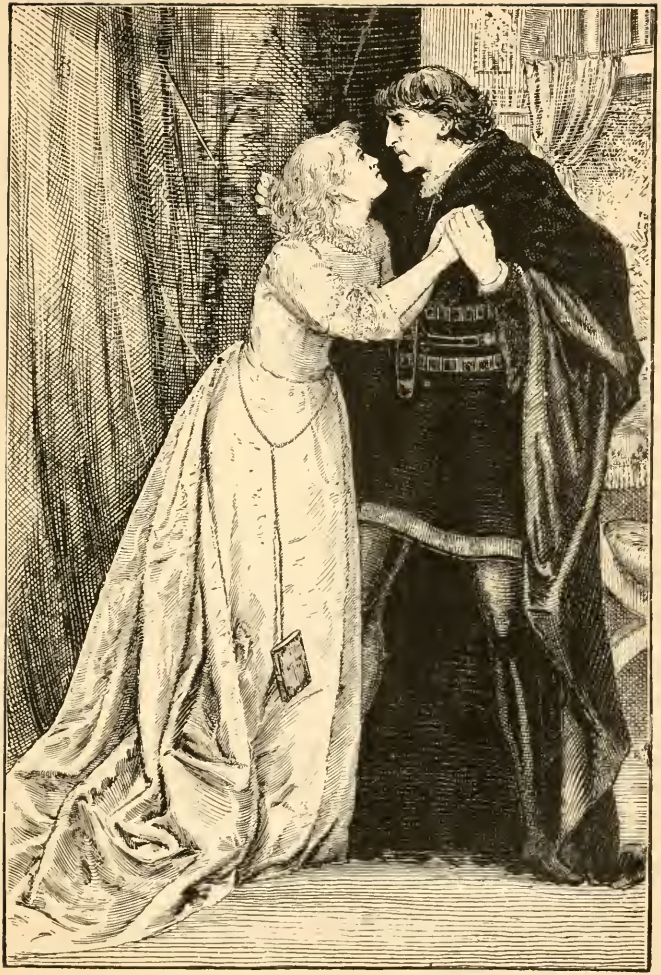
On the 17th of April, 1879, Mr. Irving appeared as Claude Melnotte in *The Lady of Lyons*, with Miss Ellen Terry as Pauline. Claude Mel-

notte it may be remembered was the part he had chosen to play, many years before, for his first benefit at Edinburgh. "However, this performance," said the *Athenaeum*, "will not add to Mr. Irving's reputation. * * The character, from the author's standpoint was not realized, the Claude Melnotte being a virile and passionate man instead of a dreamy and sentimental boy." We cannot agree with this view of the author's intention, be it said. What we look on at in this play is the sudden and rapid development of the man from the boy; this is what the actor has to show. It is a character which demands what is known as *creating* in each actor who takes it up; the author has not given substance enough to stand alone and impress itself on its representative and, on the other hand, the tradition of Macready's Claude—if such a tradition exists—is impotent in this generation. Still, with all its faults, which are so obvious as to need no remark here, this play perennially appeals to the romantic side of the audience. That Pauline should be handsome and Claude agile seems to be all that is needed to blind them to the meretricious shallowness of their characters. The situations are sufficiently critical to be extremely interesting and the sentiments poetical enough to sound extremely plausi-

ble. The language too is unquestionably graceful, and the variety of demeanor required of the chief personages veils their lack of backbone. "As impersonated by Mr Irving," said the *Theatre* "the character of Claude enlists as much sympathy as the story will possibly allow," and altogether his acting of the part sustained his reputation even if it did not greatly add to it.

During this, his first season as a manager, Mr. Irving returned to all his best and favorite parts. In this way he prudently availed himself of all the resources at his command and at the same time fairly tested his own hold upon the public, and his powers as a manager without straining them too severely. He played in *Richelieu*, *Louis XI.*, *The Bells*, *The Lyons Mail*, and *Charles I.* with Miss Terry as Henrietta Maria. Every play was mounted with lavish care and rehearsed to the last pitch of accuracy and finish.

But perhaps the most remarkable feat performed by Mr. Irving throughout that season was the assumption of a series of characters for his own benefit on July 25th and 26th. On Friday evening, July 25th, he played the first act of Richard III. with Miss Ellen Terry as Lady Anne; the fourth act of "Richelieu;" the fourth act of "Charles I.," Miss Ellen Terry as the Queen,



HENRY IRVING AND ELLEN TERRY (HAMLET — 1879).

Henrietta Maria; the third act of "Louis XI.;" part of the third act of "Hamlet;" and the farce of "Raising the Wind," in which he played Jeremy Diddler. On the following afternoon, Saturday July 26th, at 2 o'clock he repeated this programme, all but the farce, and this he performed the same evening, after "Eugene Aram." On the evening of the 25th, Mr. Irving explained in a very graceful manner his reasons for undertaking a *tour de force* which, otherwise, he must have acknowledged to be a fault in art if judged on the highest grounds.

"For nearly eight years Ladies and Gentlemen" he said, "we have met in this theatre, and the eloquence of your faces and of your applause has thrilled me again and again. * * * * To-night I have chosen to appear before you not in one character, but in six, for each part has been associated with so much pleasure, so many kindly wishes from you and such sympathetic recognition, that I wished to renew in one night some of the memories of many."

Mr. Irving's first-night and last-night speeches have now become an institution at the Lyceum; indeed, his audience refuse to leave the house till they have seen him, and he is always hailed with excited applause when he appears before the

curtain, on the very best terms with himself and his public. On this occasion their satisfaction might well be mutual, since Mr. Irving explained that the total receipts in the season of seven months had amounted to £36,000, a little under 1000 dollars a night.

Various rumors were afloat that autumn to the effect that a New York manager had offered Mr. Irving high terms to act in America. It was evidently impossible that he should cross the Atlantic at the very beginning of his career as a manager, but he wrote to the *Theatre*, a London Magazine, expressing a hope that he might some day do so, and visit his American friends.

The theatre reopened in September with *The Bells*, and within a fortnight Mr. Irving put an old play on the stage with his usual care and attention to details; but nothing could make *The Iron Chest* thoroughly interesting; the only person for whom it is possible to care is Sir Edward Mortimer, and nevertheless a number of personages, of the old melodramatic smuggler type, are are indispensable to the plot, and are intolerably dull. The youthful secretary—played by pretty young Norman Forbes—engaged our sympathies, but there was no genuine interest in the story. Mr. Irving can act a one-part play as few people

can; but that is a different thing altogether to acting the only part when there are half a dozen other personages to make the action drag till the main motive is almost forgotten between the important scenes. The steward however was well played by Mr. J. Carter. *The Iron Chest* was however perhaps only meant as a stop-gap at the beginning of a new season, while the finishing touches were being put to a gorgeously-mounted edition—if we may so call it—of *The Merchant of Venice*. Miss Ellen Terry did not play in *The Iron Chest*, the small part of the heroine being filled by her pretty little sister Miss Florence Terry; she reappeared for a short time as Ophelia, and then on the 1st of November came before the Lyceum public in the part of Portia. She had already played it at the Prince of Wales with a success that was perhaps enhanced by the defects of the other actors. Mr. Coghlan's Shylock had not been satisfactory; it is a part demanding characteristics and natural gifts which that very conscientious artist can not command, and Miss Terry had shone as the only star of any magnitude in the whole cast. However, she lost nothing in being seen in the midst of a much stronger company at the Lyceum.

The revival was a brilliant success; splendidly

mounted, beautifully dressed, and thoroughly rehearsed, there was nothing omitted that the most exacting could wish for. The play was delightful to see and to remember. As in a later Shakespearian revival at the same theatre—*Much Ado About Nothing*—an air of ease, wealth, beauty, and romance was shed over everything which was enchanting at the time and left a feeling in the mind as of a brief visit to some happier realm than our work-a-day world of common-place.

With regard to the acting too, the critics were more truly unanimous perhaps than they had been about any other part played by Mr. Irving. In the first place he had the admirable good taste not to treat the trial scene and discomfiture of Shylock as the end and aim of the play; he perceived, and he was right, that a merely negative satisfaction in the punishment of malice and revengefulness was not in the least what Shakespeare had intended to be the crowning close of the drama. Shylock stole off the stage with a savage snarl and lowering scowl, but we were taken back to Belmont to witness the triumph and happiness of Portia. It was not till the play had a long run that it was abridged, in spite of many remonstrances, to make a way for an afterpiece. Then Shylock, without being a becoming part, certainly

suits Mr. Irving to a wonder. He has nothing Jewish in him by nature—a little narrowness about the eyes perhaps, but that is due to short sight, certainly not another feature—and yet there is hardly any—if any—other part in which he is so nearly quit of Henry Irving as he is in that of the Jew. His peculiarities fit the part so far as he clings to them and he has taken the broad generalities of the character as a type, in both hands and moulded them to fit the details of personality of which he is master. Now this, we take it, is a very high standard of histrionic art and power, and in this respect Shylock is one of his great achievements.

A very able criticism of the presentment was published in the *Daily News*. "He is not the decrepit Jew nor the grotesque Jew. * * * Malignant by nature he scarcely seems to be, though the ever-present hunger for retaliation on behalf of himself and his race gathers strength from persecution, till it reaches its height in the famous scene with Tubal. Shylock is represented by Mr. Irving as an old, though not a very old man. The most striking departure from the traditional performance is the comparatively listless air of his demeanor in the trial scene, only relieved, as it is once or twice, by outbursts of ferocious eager-

ness. But the prevailing mood in this scene is that of a mind that has brooded over vengeance until the sleepless eyes have grown hollow, the mind become vacant, the outward world endowed with a weird unreal aspect, and vengeance itself is like the predominant image of a dream. Thus, in the end, even hatred seems to fade out, and when Gratiano's brutal jest arouses him, he simply fixes his eyes slowly upon his persecutor, shakes his head, and turning, disappears from the scene with a slow walk and downcast look. The tendency of the performance is to lessen our hatred of the Jew, to give prominence to his wrongs and to suggest that his avarice is but the habit of a persecuted tribe."

The production of *The Merchant of Venice* gave occasion to an interesting observation in the *Theatre*, to which we shall again refer in discussing Mr. Irving's social influence as the "Member for the Stage" as we may call him. "This revival at the Lyceum," says the critic, "deals another blow at the movement for establishing a national theatre; * * * its promoters are now wholly unable to pretend that a theatre in which the poetic drama can be adequately presented has yet to be established. The revival of *The Merchant of Venice*, regarded from any point of view is at least

equal — and we are not speaking without knowledge — to anything that has been done in the subsidized theatres of the European continent. Mr. Irving's Shylock and Miss Terry's Portia could hardly be surpassed; the performance, as a whole, is distinguished by an *ensemble* hitherto supposed to be unattainable beyond the precincts of the *Théatre Français*. * * * Mr. Irving in short has made Shakespeare popular.

"That Shylock will take a prominent place among the characters that Mr. Irving has assumed there can be no question. The impersonation is full of his best qualities as an actor — imagination, sympathy, independence of thought, and wealth of illustrative detail. Shylock appears before us under three different aspects; first he is the usurer, then the outraged father, and finally the vengeful creditor. Mr. Irving's appearance is in harmony with his view of the part. He comes before us as a man of between fifty and sixty years of age. His acting at the beginning is studiously quiet in tone. It is as he utters the words:

'Antonio shall become bound, — well?'

that the idea of vengeance crosses his mind.

"The scene which follows Jessica's flight is sustained with great power. * * * Then comes the

fierce thirst for revenge which follows the news of Antonio's ill-fortune, and again the actor rises equal to the requirements of the situation. By the time of the trial, however, the storm has subsided into a dead calm. * * * His face wears a hard, set expression, relieved at long intervals by a glance of bitter hate at Antonio, or a faint smile of triumph. Nor is this superb calm less conspicuous when the cause turns against him; the scales drop from his hands—but that is all. Nothing can be finer and more impressive than his final exit which brought the performance to a close worthy of what had gone before.

"The Portia of Miss Ellen Terry is one of her brightest impersonations and she now surpasses even what she did at the *Prince of Wales's Theatre* four or five years ago. While London possesses such artists as Mr. Irving and Miss Terry the public interest in the higher forms of drama is not likely to languish."

"The performance is altogether consistent and harmonious, and displays anew that power of self-control which has lately come to Mr. Irving as a fresh possession. Every temptation to extravagance or eccentricity of action was resolutely resisted and with the happiest results. Mr. Irving's Shylock, old, haggard, halting, sordid, rep-

resents the dignity and intellect of the play." (Dutton Cook).

"As Shakespeare went below the surface of realistic comedy," says another critic, "to inspire his Jew with fervent pride of race and meditative individuality, so Irving has gone below the moral stateliness of modern Shylocks, to impart to his impersonation, at its very heart, the ruling features of a Jew such as Shakespeare has drawn. These feelings are betrayed in his face, in his port, in his postures, and in his gait. * * * As in the play, so in the acting, the greatest intellectual triumph lies in the ample grasp and powerful expression of Shylock's profound and consuming Hebraism. Shakespeare's composition abounds in the loftiest and in the lowliest treatment of the subject. Irving's rendering has caught the motive and vivified the details of the theme." The breadth and keenness of this critique is very remarkable, and shows a sound appreciation of Hebrew character and of Shakespeare's masterly comprehension of it, as well as a very judicious sympathy with the strong grasp that Mr. Irving has on any part worthy of his thoughtful talent.

The Merchant of Venice deserved, and had, a very long run; it was not till it had been played two hundred and fifty times that a change was

thought necessary, and then *Charles I.* was reproduced. On the 20th of May, 1880, Miss Ellen Terry took her benefit in the part of the blind princess in *Iolanthe*. This is a "dramatic idyl," adapted for the stage by Mr. Wills—as *King Rene's daughter* had been by Mr. (now Sir Theodore) Martin—from a Swedish poem by Henrik Herz. This play continued to be acted till the end of the season as an afterpiece to *The Merchant of Venice*, which—as has been said—was curtailed of its last act to allow of this arrangement. *Iolanthe* was Miss Terry's play; but there was a pretty part for Mr. Irving in Count Tristan, which he made "picturesque and chivalrously reverent." "The part makes no great demand on Miss Terry's resources, but it bears high witness to her artistic gifts. No performer of our time possesses in anything like the same degree the power of casting off the special accent of modern life, and of passing without effort into the region of ideal fancy. * * In the ability to embody a conception of primitive grace, and to express the simpler moods of feeling, either joyous or pathetic, that are their fitting accompaniments, she is, to our thinking, without a rival upon the stage."

So wrote Mr. Comyns Case *à propos* to Iolanthe

and we have quoted his opinion because it seems to us one of the truest criticisms ever written of this charming actress. She has not the whole art of concealing art, but when artlessness is to the point she is incomparable, and the remarks here quoted are equally applicable to her performance in the first act of *The Cup*, in Olivia, and in Letitia Hardy.

Mr. Irving reopened his theatre that autumn with *The Corsican Brothers*. He was received with the hurricane of welcome which now always awaits him after his holiday, and which he certainly has taken infinite pains and spared no expense to deserve. But probably not one of his friends and admirers that evening failed to feel a pang of regret at his selecting that vapid melodrama for *rentrée* when he had made his last bow in the gabardine of the Shakespearian Jew.

The story of the play need not be told here. We who can remember its first production by Charles Kean, with Alfred Wigan as Château Renaud, must confess that its effect in Mr. Irving's hands was inadequate. Perhaps it is because he has accustomed us to stronger meat—to the horror of *The Bells*, the pathos of *Charles I.*, the tenderness of *Hamlet*—that the situations of this melodrama, which, thirty years ago created a perfect *furore*

among London play-goers, now produce comparatively little effect. But we are inclined to think it is partly owing to a defect, an error in judgment, pointed out by Mr. Dutton Cook, a very competent critic, who thinks that Mr. Irving failed to suggest the glamour of mystery and impending doom, the key-note which Charles Kean was so careful to strike. The loss of this element is fatal to the interest of the play; nothing short of an irresistible destiny can give coherence to such an inconsequent plot and to the incalculable behavior of Fabien dei Franchi. However, the *Athenaeum* differs from us. "Mr. Irving's performance of the twins," it says, "is full of color, and the fateful element is well shown." It is in the last act that he is seen at his best; still, there is a want of continuity of character in his Fabien, who, in the first act, is so prompt and brusque and here has developed into a cool and resolute duellist. The current of events is exciting it is true, and as Louis Mr. Irving gives us one of his touches of courteous sentiment in his action and demeanor towards Emilie de L'Esparre; but — excepting that what is worth doing at all is worth doing well — the wonder remains that Mr. Irving ever thought the parts of the twins deserving of so much elaboration and finish. But he knows the

saying about "*Toujours perdrix*," and though the parts of the dei Franchi are not so high a mark as Mr. Irving can aim at—and hit, he is no doubt judicious to give himself opportunities for the display of a very considerable versatility, and the play was so far a success that it held the stage, sometimes as a first piece before a comedy, and sometimes as an afterpiece, following *The Cup*, for some months.

At the New Year *The Cup* was produced (January 3d) and expectation ran high though doubts were felt as to the success of another poetical drama by the poet laureate. *The Cup* however was a very different piece of work from the dreary and didactic drama of *Queen Mary*, brought out five years previously under Mrs. Bateman's auspices; and while Miss Terry could not probably have played Queen Mary it is very certain that Miss Bateman could have done but little with the first act of Camma. "The author of *The Cup*," says Mr. Comyns Case, "has good reason to be content with the services of those who have undertaken the labor of presenting his work to the public. I can think of no other actor who could have given the part of Synorix the impression of vitality which it assumes in Mr. Irving's hands * * in the earlier

scenes with Camma the sinister softness of his wooing carries the subtlest suggestion of the inherent falseness of his character. There is no question of failure in respect of *The Cup* in the form in which it is presented at the Lyceum; its success is beyond dispute, and the causes of its success are obvious enough. It is superbly mounted and it is admirably acted." The story, borrowed from an antique source, may be said to be the primeval tragedy of life; a simple as purely human and as disastrous as that of Cain and Abel. A man—a Galatian lord loves his neighbor's wife and kills the husband. The woman loathes and murders him by putting poison into the cup of which both must drink at their marriage feast. The motives are so elementary that no genuine development of character is needed, and the poet, it may be said, has given us absolutely none; there is a sense of poetical situation but a lack of grip in painting the human forces that lead up to it, and even Mr. Irving, though he made the villain a man, could not give him much individuality. But for this, he and Miss Terry would have been admirably suited with their parts and indeed "as it is the outlines have been really admirably understood and rendered by both actor and actress. Mr. Irving's own power of

grim satire serves him in good stead in giving vitality to the picture; he was never more incisive in his method; he never expressed with a more extraordinary fidelity the force of evil and mean desire. Miss Terry has seldom been seen to greater advantage than in the first act at any rate. She is not a tragic actress though her power of representing a degree of personal anguish that is in one sense genuinely tragical is very considerable; but her force is not great enough to carry her through scenes of violence." The church scene in *Much Ado About Nothing* and the sorrows of the wretched Olivia are more fitted to her delicate and pathetic means of expression and her touching tones and accent. In March Mr. Irving published a bill of "prospective arrangements," and announced that he proposed varying the programme; that April 9th would be the last of *The Corsican Brothers*, and that Mr. Booth's visit would add still further to the attractions he should offer during the summer season. After a short holiday in Passion week, April 9th to 16th, *The Belle's Stratagem* took the place of *The Corsican Brothers;* it was still preceded by *The Cup* and the remarkable versatility thus exhibited by both Mr. Irving and Miss Terry was, no doubt, as clever as it was startling.

The *Athenæum* thought Doricourt too elaborate, "in place of simplicity we find extravagance and caricature;" but we fail to see where the simplicity could "come in," for, if there is any thing which Doricourt is not, it is simple. The *Daily News*, whose admiration for Mr Irving is at all times tempered with judgment, and sometimes with very good judgment, is we think in this instance hypercritical; or perhaps the critic had not made due allowance, after seeing Mr Irving die in long and writhing agony as Synorix, for his resurrection as a somewhat profligate beau of the last century. "He does not attain the ideal of the character," not being graceful so much as eccentric even in the ballroom. "Yet the performance, even so far, cannot be said to be uninteresting; and in the scenes in which Doricourt feigns madness the actor develops a power of combining the grotesquely ludicrous with a tinge of serious reality that is curiously impressive."

This is the truth—it is "curiously impressive." It is a little vexing to see Synorix—Hamlet—Othello, playing the fool; but he is so desperately in earnest in acting that he is acting, that our attention is involuntarily riveted. This madness, quasi madness, could not for an instant take in any rational creature; it is the gravity of

purpose that appeals to us and though we laugh frankly enough at Doricourt's vagaries it is rather in spite of ourselves. With regard to the want of grace it is, curiously enough, not lack of elegance. It is as natural a defect—for we confess that the accusation has some foundation—as it might, and indeed must, have been to many a man born in Doricourt's rank of life and destined to swagger through the world as a fine gentleman—in fact, the absence of apparently studied grace lends it the elegance of a man whose birth and position can dispense with adventitious polish.

"Doricourt," says Mr. Dutton Cook, "with his airs and graces is one of the characters which Mr. Irving delights to play from time to time, to show us that a thousand performances of *The Bells* and of tragedy have not dulled his sense of humor and capacity to amuse. His performance is wonderfully complete," worthy in finish and whimsical detail to be compared with poor Edward Sothern's Dundreary. "I can remember," says Mr. Clement Scott, "when Mr. Irving played it first, a comparatively unknown man, and it is a much better performance now—more thoughtful, more studied, more complete. Words fail me to express the singular charm and spell of Miss Ellen Terry as Letitia Hardy." In the dedication of her comedy Mrs.

Cowley explains that it was her intention to draw a woman who, "to the most lively sensibility, fine understanding, and elegant accomplishments, should unite that beautiful reserve and delicacy which, while they veil those charms, render them all the more interesting." Miss Terry has understood this intention and her reading does justice to the ideal; she adds to it a sparkle which Mrs. Cowley's excellent dramatic treatment of the character gives ample scope for and which makes Miss Letitia Hardy a far more engaging person than her creator's rather priggish description might otherwise prepare us for. Miss Terry has thrown herself into the humor of the situation as well as the refinement of the character; Letitia Hardy lives and moves the ideal lady and the most irresistible of hoidens.

It was in July, 1880, that the London public were first promised a visit from Mr. Booth and looked forward to it with the greatest interest. Acting, not merely as an amusement but as an art, has of late years become far better understood by the more cultivated classes in England than it had been during a long period when—though there were many capital actors on the English stage—the demand had been less for an intellectual and critical pleasure than for a hearty laugh or a no less

hearty cry. "It will be especially interesting," said the *Athenaeum* in speaking of Edwin Booth's advent, "to contrast his methods with those of the one English tragedian who has risen to eminence within the last ten years * * * the warmth of personal welcome which is not denied to a Salvini or a Rossi—poetical aliens, who gesticulate through an Italianized Shakespeare—will certainly be accorded to one who comes to us from a greater England, speaking Shakespeare's tongue."

"The engagement of Edwin Booth at the Lyceum in conjunction with Henry Irving is just the kindly, generous and spirited act that might have been expected from an actor ever on the alert to do credit to his profession. The play chosen will be *Othello*." "When Edwin Booth arrived in this country, a foolish, weak, and impotent attempt was made on the part of an ungenerous faction to declare that Henry Irving was jealous of him. Nothing was further from the truth. Booth never believed it to be true, and Irving was guiltless of any such idea. * * * Booth always wanted to play at Irving's theatre. * * * Everything that courtesy and good feeling could do was done, and Irving treated Booth as a friend: 'Come to my theatre and play with me, and we will have such a com-

bination as has not been seen for some time.'" (*Theatre*, April, 1881).

And so it was settled. During the months of May and June the regular business of the theatre was varied by performances, three nights a week, of *Othello*, Mr. Irving and Mr. Booth playing the Moor and Iago alternately. Mr. Booth had already been in England some months, and these were in fact his farewell performances in England.

A few words as to Mr. Booth's birth and the traditions he inherited may here be appropriate. His father was an Englishman whose misfortune it was when still young to be pitted against Edmund Kean who on the occasion of their playing together — Kean as Othello and Booth as Iago — worked himself up to such a performance as has rarely been seen or dreamed of. Booth felt that with such a rival on the stage his chances were nil; he left the Drury Lane boards to Kean, and after acting in Covent Garden for a few years went to America where he steadily improved, working, no doubt, on the grand traditions of the old English stage, which he transmitted, with his talents, to his son. The contrast of method between Booth and Irving is unmistakable. Booth, it is true, has to some extent moved in the same direction as Irving; he has thought for himself and is

no slave to tradition; still as compared with him Irving is revolutionary. However, anything like partisanship or bitter rivalry was, of course, quite out of the question. "No one," says the *Daily News*, "will suspect Mr. Irving of grudging his American brother in art any portion of the generous welcome which assuredly awaits Mr. Irving when he shall undertake his professional visit to the United States, so long in contemplation." The English critics, too, it must be said, did Edwin Booth every justice. The only rock round which he could not steer—over which he could not soar, was the fact which we have indicated on the first page of this little book; namely, that as Mr. Irving's triumphant success is the result of his individuality as the representative to Englishmen of the spirit of their age and tendencies, the actor who, like Booth, represents or at any rate recalls the spirit of the past, has not, and cannot obtain, the same hold upon their sympathies. It is very greatly to be regretted that the American public should not see the really wonderful exhibition of art offered by *Othello* played by Irving, Booth, and Ellen Terry. Opinions differ widely as to the merits of the performance in detail; but the very variety of fault found by the critics—whether Irving plays Othello and Booth

Iago, or vice versa—proves that though nothing is or can ever be faultless the effects are undoubtedly to a considerable extent in the sympathy—perhaps even in the mood—of the spectators. In Othello one of the great beauties of Irving's acting finds full play: "his tenderness," says *The Saturday Review*, "to Desdemona is exquisite;" but, as usual, "the phrasing is sometimes unfortunate." However, "the present performance of Othello (after an interval of five years since 1876) marks more clearly than anything else could do the amount of thought and pains which Mr. Irving must constantly devote to his art."

It is in the part of Iago however that both Mr. Booth and Mr. Irving gave such a piece of finished acting as made their performances an education in itself. Let any young actor, take up Iago for himself, read into it, and distil out of it every trait of character, every point of situation, feeling and emotion that he is capable of attributing to the Ancient—as a man and as influenced by the other characters; then let him see first Irving and then Booth perform the part and he will be able to form some idea of the work they have done, and that remains for him to do. Let him take to heart the fact that the gifts and the experience he here sees displayed to their highest

pitch of development are also brought to bear on other parts, less difficult no doubt but not less carefully handled, and he will understand that though he may not hope or even wish ever to play Iago he has chosen an art which makes constant demands on his patience, industry, and sympathetic endeavor. "Mr. Irving's Iago is one of his best Shakespearian essays," writes Mr. Dutton Cook; "forcible, ingenious, characteristic—a little melodramatic perhaps here and there; but his reputation for honesty is made readily intelligible; it arises from his rude frank air, now cynical, now convivial yet always really malevolent * * We have here two simply masterly Iagos, two insufficient Othellos." In comparing the two Iagos we find *The Saturday Review*, always conscientious and careful though sometimes incautious in its criticism, selecting certain points of difference to the advantage of one and the other actor. "Mr. Irving's Iago had been eagerly expected. * * * With one exception, as it seems to us, Mr. Irving shows us an ideal Iago; and this exception we take to the seriousness of the revengeful motive he gives to the Ancient. He seems to take Iago's jealousy of Othello, if not of Cassio, with regard to Emilia as a real thing." * * "Mr. Booth seemed to indicate that the notion of Emilia's

infidelity is in the first instance merely an excuse for his own villany." Again, and on the other side: "Mr. Booth disappointed our expectations in the well-known lines ending:

> 'Out of her own goodness make the net
> That shall enmesh them all.'

"His action was full of grace, meaning, and force; but his tones and expression seemed to miss the exultation of a man who has just thought out his villanous scheme, and who delights as much in his own power of so thinking it out as in the probable success of the scheme itself." In Mr. Irving's performance "we must point out the honest reluctance with which he seems to give his evidence against Cassio. Close upon this and upon his seeming friendly cheering of Cassio, comes the soliloquy ending with:

> 'And out of her own goodness make the net
> That shall enmesh them all.'

"The diabolical intensity of this was much aided by the impressive stillness of the actor until the last picturesque and meaning gesture of triumph."

From the same weekly we cull the following paragraph, which our readers may take for what it is worth. We believe it is true that Mr. Booth

found the direction at the Lyceum worthy of the manager and he certainly was immeasurably better supported there than he had been at Sadlers' Wells where he first acted in London. "By a curious inversion or confusion of language Mr. Booth has been represented, in an account coming from America, as having found the stage-management of the Lyceum, as it would seem from the context, 'so bad as to be frightful,' while the direction of the theatre generally was not what it ought to be. Now it is tolerably well known that Mr. Booth was, on the contrary, even enthusiastic in his praise of Mr. Irving's management, both of the stage and of the theatre generally. It should be added that the same account contains the highest praise of Mr. Irving." (*Saturday Review*, July 16, 1881). An intelligent and appreciative critic in Macmillan's Magazine, who by no means "swallows Irving whole," has some very judicious remarks to make on the subject: "The character of Iago as understood and presented by these two actors," he says, "very clearly marks the distinguishing quality of their respective styles. The American Iago, clear, cool, and precise, admirably thought out, never deviating a hair's-breadth from the preconceived plan; design and execution marching hand-in-hand with

ordered step from the first scene to the last; a performance of marvellous balance and regularity, polished to the very finger-nail. The Englishman's startling, picturesque, irregular, brilliant, sometimes less brilliant than bizarre, but always fresh and suggestive, always bearing that peculiar stamp of personality which has so often saved the actor in his sorest straits. Nevertheless, as a work of art, an artistic whole, self-contained and complete, to Mr. Booth's must be assigned the palm * * * It has truly been said of Mr. Irving that he is never commonplace, but it must be remembered that this freedom from commonplace may be purchased at the expense of common-sense." The whole article is very good, sympathetic but full of sound criticism.

"Comparison ceases to be odious," says the *Daily Telegraph*, "in the case of actors so distinguished and so popular as Edwin Booth and Henry Irving. The method of each actor starts from opposite points. Mr. Booth moves in the path chalked out by his father and the traditions he inherited; Mr. Irving, like the elder Kean, 'translates his characters with great freedom and ingenuity into a language of his own,' and seems to take a mischievous delight in politely granting the value of the various readings of clever men

and immediately conceiving something totally different. In Mr. Booth's Othello the classical form is strained to the utmost tension while Mr. Irving's Iago is occasionally jeopardized by an excess of gesture and a prodigality of variety." Mr. Booth's Othello too, it may be observed incidentally, had the same fault as Irving's—even more marked perhaps—Desdemona could not have loved him. Neither of them could be the ideal Othello to any woman excepting by such a process of rational self-persuasion of his merits, as is certainly not presupposed by the narrative or the situation.

Mr. Irving's benefit on Saturday, July 23d, terminated the season of 1881. He appeared, we believe for the first and last time, in a scene with Miss Terry from *The Hunchback*, in which he played Modus; but he could not altogether look the part, which is that of a bashful student lover, though he played it with feeling. His old friend Mr. Toole acted for him in one of his most popular parts; that of Tom Cranky in the *Birthplace of Podgers*.

In the speech which Mr. Irving made to the audience, he spoke in a way equally becoming to himself and flattering to Mr. Booth, of their performances together: "For myself I may say that his artistic fellowship, his perfect courtesy and de-

votion to our common art have made Mr. Booth's visit here one of the most delightful occurrences in my remembrance."

It was in December, 1879, for the benefit of Mr. William Belford—"a man whose hand was, of old, first in his pocket to help others," and who had fallen into bad health *—that Mr. Irving first revived *The Two Roses* at the Lyceum. This performance was one of those interesting tributes of respect by which the guild of actors does itself honor while honoring and substantially helping a fellow-artist. Nearly fifty of the first actors in London appeared on the stage before an enthusiastic audience whose contributions, by way of payment for places, amounted to a very handsome sum. "Once more," says Mr. Clement Scott, "Henry Irving has played Digby Grant and I am glad of it, for it has shown incontestably what an actor he has become * * * I am certain that never before did he act the part so well, or anything like so well. * * The audience at the close of each act seemed to sink back in the stalls with a contented sigh saying: 'Ah! this is acting.'" And so it was, and I really don't know where the pessimists will find anything better. "Mr. Irving's Digby Grant was as good as ever. If he had

* Mr. Belford died in June, 1881.

created it now for the first time the creation would have been pronounced a worthy successor to his Mathias, Hamlet, and Richelieu."

When the Lyceum Theatre reopened, newly decorated and in many ways improved, on the 26th of December, 1881, Mr. Irving revived *The Two Roses* in which he had "created" the part of Digby Grant eleven years before. The revival was an immense success; Mr. Irving had retouched the picture with the skill and judgment given by long experience. "The portrait was filled in with an infinite number of minute but valuable touches;" and here again we find the critic speaking of "the curious suggestiveness," of certain gestures, accents, and actions, which filled up the outline given by the clever author—Mr. Albery—in what is originally a capitally-written character part, so as to give it the vitality of an elaborately-finished picture. "Digby Grant is infinitely improved. To the plausibility of Mercadet he adds the virtuous assumption of Mr. Pecksniff."

But *The Two Roses* was only a *lever de rideau* before the serious work of the season. In March, 1882, Mr. Irving redeemed a promise of many months standing to produce *Romeo and Juliet*, and the *mise-en-scène* and dresses were marked by the magnificent naturalism which—for good or

for evil — he has been instrumental in transferring from the domain of Robertsonian comedy, as mounted by the Bancrofts, to the higher realm of poetical and tragical drama. It was not less splendid than *The Merchant of Venice* and even more beautiful; but it was severely criticised on those very grounds.

Mr. Frederick Wedmore wrote of it as follows: "One of the pleasantest things to remember in connection with this Lyceum revival will be the evidence it affords of the employment of knowledge, skill, and artistic sensibility. The acting is not insignificant and very far from ludicrous, but the magnificence of the accessories are now and then a splendid encumbrance. Mr. Irving's judgment is displayed by his avoiding any effort to look like a smooth and comely lad; you must take the man as he is;" (how impossible with Romeo—) "his complete activity and alertness, his picturesqueness of aspect and his continual intelligence of the character, though they do not allow him to be an absolutely ideal Romeo, allow him to be a Romeo of impulse, fire, and passion." "*Romeo and Juliet*," said the *Daily Telegraph*, "does not rise to the level of the Lyceum standard in point of acting. The scenery is gorgeous. Irving's Romeo is picturesque and careful but he fails to convey

the idea of Romeo." All the critics agreed that Miss Terry's Juliet was the least successful thing she had ever done.

"To Mr. Irving's Romeo," said the *Saturday Review*, "some of Hazlitt's remarks upon Edmund Kean in the same part may be not inaptly applied: 'In going to see Mr. Kean in any new character we do not go in the expectation of seeing either a perfect actor, or perfect acting; because this is what we have not seen either in him or in any one else. But we go to see (what he never disappoints us in) great spirit, ingenuity, and originality given to the text in general, and an energy and depth of passion given to certain scenes and passages, which we should in vain look for from any other actor on the stage.' Mr. Irving has many advantages which Edmund Kean had not; — it would seem improbable, for instance, that Kean can have made so chivalrous a figure of Romeo as Irving does — and he does not invite the censure which was given by Hazlitt to Kean in the love scenes. * * Mr. Irving is full of thought and fancy; but he is not Romeo."

Mr. Sala — our old friend G. A. S. — in the *Illustrated London News* declares that "as the impassioned lover Mr. Irving satisfies him," and he gives good reason for the faith that he professes —

"a powerful and soulful impersonation," he calls it—but he admits that he stands alone. The mounting was confessedly magnificent, perhaps it a little overweighted the performance. "Since the days when Charles Kean began to supply what was derisively called upholstery a Shakespearian revival has come to mean a pageant. To Mr. Irving then belongs the credit of having furnished a pageant which in beauty and artistic value has not been equalled, and of backing it up by an interpretation of the play as competent as modern resources will permit. * * That the representation in the principal characters or in any of the characters touches greatness or ever rises to the level of the best Lyceum performances cannot be said. Mr. Irving introduces much intelligent business, and is earnest and impassioned — but he fails to convey the idea of Romeo." *(Daily News).* Mr. Irving himself, however, on the occasion of his benefit, August 5th, stoutly defended his lavish use of decorations and accessories. "Romeo and Juliet," he said, "was no light undertaking, and it is perhaps worth remembering that to each actor in the cast it was a first-night's representation. This in a play of Shakespeare's, is somewhat remarkable, and difficult beyond belief to those who do not know the disadvantages which actors labor under

on their first appearance in what are called legitimate parts. * * It was thought too by some I remember that I had overdone our play with scenery and trappings. That I distinctly dispute. Nothing in my mind can be overdone on the stage that is beautiful — I mean correct and harmonious, and that heightens, not dwarfs the imagination and reality. I took no less pains comparatively speaking in producing *The Two Roses.*"

Mr. Irving's address was characterized throughout by that *bonhomie* and intimacy which have long given a friendly aspect to his relations with the public. "It was conspicuous, among other matters, for the defence of long runs. *Romeo and Juliet* had been played 130 nights in succession;" he almost apologized to his colleague Miss Terry for the severe strain he had thus put upon her "but those who live to please must please to live." He did not, however, allude — perhaps he was discreet in not alluding — to the question as to how far very long runs are advantageous to the actor's art, and to the actor himself as an artist.

Mr. Irving added some courteous — we had almost said affectionate — compliments to the friends who so faithfully and perennially support his benefits. "Thanks to your generous favor every night is a benefit to me as a manager; but on occasions

like this I come forward to take the benefit of seeing around me many of my best and well-tried friends who throughout my career, my failures and successes, have succored me with their hearty sympathy and cheered me with ungrudging encouragement. * * Whether it be called a benefit, or by any other name, I shall always be proud of the occasion which can gather together such a distinguished assembly as have honored me with their presence here to-night." Such a speech as this charms and flatters; nay touches a deeper fibre of genuine enthusiasm. In June, Mr. Irving had announced his purpose of visiting America and spending six months there, from the end of October, 1883, till April, 1884, taking with him the Lyceum company, and dresses and scenery complete for ten pieces: *Hamlet*, *Charles the First*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Richard the Third*, *Richelieu*, *The Lyons Mail*, *The Belle's Stratagem*, *Louis the Eleventh*, *The Bells*, and *Much Ado About Nothing*. G. A. S. advises us to appeal to the hero and heroine of this tour — which may rather be called a progress — to give a few representations of *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Cup*. He was however, as we have seen, in a minority in admiring *Romeo and Juliet*; and with regard to *The Cup* we believe that Miss Terry at any rate

is showing the better part of valor in leaving the part of Camma at home. The first act is charming, is acting, indeed; but the second is scenery and mounting, *et praeterea nihil* — or very little. G. A. S. prophesies — and no doubt rightly — that "the Americans will go wild with enthusiasm on Miss Ellen Terry," but Camma would risk her *prestige* we fear even with enthusiasts.

After a holiday of only 6 or 8 weeks, *Romeo and Juliet* was again taken up when the Lyceum reopened in September, and was played till the middle of October. Then another brilliant "Shakespearian revival" was put upon the stage. This time a comedy; one of the Arcadian comedies that transport us to a realm and age when "all the men were brave and all the women beautiful;" or when those who were not were unhappy accidents serving as a foil only to the majority who were.

On the 25th of July of this year Mr. Irving had read the part of Benedick with a once famous Beatrice, Lady Martin — formerly Helen Faucit — whose grace and intelligent originality bewitched the play-goers of the last generation. This read-

ing must have been extraordinarily interesting, and not least interesting to Irving himself, to whom it must have felt like a prelude, a preliminary chord in anticipation of the performance which, on October the 12th, reminded London play-goers once more that Shakespeare's Comedy was, if possible, even more lovely than his Tragedy, and that Irving knew and felt that it was alike his duty and his pleasure to interpret Shakespeare.

Much Ado About Nothing was the matter in hand. This lovely play, sumptuously mounted, ran *Romeo and Juliet* very hard in the splendor of its scenery and general "get up;" and in the estimation of those who admire Irving and Miss Terry it is difficult to choose between the gay romance of *Much Ado* and the melancholy romance of *Hamlet*. Benedick does not, it is true, become Mr. Irving quite so well as Hamlet does, but then Beatrice is so absolutely written for Ellen Terry.

It was long since this play had been put on the stage and longer still since it had been thoroughly well done; still its merits and success were not comparative but, we may say, superlative. Mrs. Charles Kean had been the last Beatrice—a rather matronly one perhaps; Miss Glyn had played the part, but tragedy was the line she

preferred; Miss Helen Faucit had been delightful in it we are told, and we can quite believe that she gave it infinite playful grace, though she lacked perhaps the audacity of Miss Terry's humor. Benedick had been a famous part of Charles Kemble's, and that elegant actor must, we rather suspect, have given a somewhat more dignified aspect to the "officer and gentleman"—which Benedick undoubtedly was—than we see in Mr. Irving's performance. At the same time it is possible that the Kemble manner was at least as annoying as the Irving manner, though Charles Kemble was freer from it than his more famous brother and sister. Macready notes in his diary that he acted Benedick "very well"—much to his own satisfaction at any rate—and Mr. Wallack also played the part in London. He again was possibly a little heavy in his banter, and a very little over-solemnity makes Benedick appear as though he were being made a fool of, while flightiness and flippancy make him look as though he really were a fool.

"The personal peculiarities and shortcomings of an actor of any force are speedily forgiven him. The play-goers of the past soon learnt to forget the low stature of Garrick and the 'foggy throat' of John Kemble. It is understood now that every

delineation presented by Mr. Irving must suffer in some degree from the irremediable physical characteristics of the actor." *(Nights at the play. Othello).*

"Irving's Romeo could not pass unchallenged," nor can his Benedick, though the challenge is a more timid one; but for pure enjoyment of a play—or *going to the play* as we say—an evening spent in the society of those beautifully-dressed, admirably-graceful ladies and gentlemen, in that Lyceum-land where, as in the Isle of the Lotos-eaters, it is "always afternoon," is perfect. When we leave we have indeed "been to the play"—not merely looked on at a performance, but *been* there—to the home of chivalry, romance, ease, and wealth, where nothing sordid can ever enter, though malice and all uncharitableness creep in to make it human and to stir those softer emotions without which Paradise itself would not be perfect. The secret of the charm is revealed by G. A. S. "Although Benedick and Beatrice are only the hero and heroine of an under-plot they are undoubtedly the personages in the comedy in whom the interest of the spectators is concentrated" because *(we say because)* "they have nothing to do with the delectable conspiracy of Don John."

He adds, in speaking of the *mise-en-scène*: "one recognizes everywhere traces of the master-mind of the earnest student and accomplished artist, whose rise to the very highest in his useful and ennobling profession is only another proof of the wisdom of the maxim that 'Genius is a great power of taking pains.'

"Elliston and Lewis were famous Benedicks, but very dissimilar it would seem. It strikes me that the Benedick of Mr. Henry Irving is a happy combination of the characteristics of the two; only, as they were both in their graves before he was born, it is clear that the merit of the presentation of a Benedick at once earnest and airy, gallant and resolute, frank and careless, humorous and grave, belongs to Mr. Henry Irving alone. The Beatrice of Miss Ellen Terry is an entirely fascinating and lovable performance."

"In the part of Benedick," says the *Daily News*, "it must be confessed the chances were less strong against Irving than in Romeo, or Doricourt, or Claude Melnotte. There is a more manly fibre about him, together with a far more subtle combination of personal qualities than can be associated in the mind with the wayward, impulsive, boyish Romeo. Still, there can be no question that the part makes much higher demands upon

the powers of an actor than that of the lovesick Montague, and it is likely to be an additional recommendation in the eyes of a great and ambitious performer that it affords a better hope of originality in the interpretation. The extremes of the conceptions hitherto shown on the stage were the dashing coxcomb portrayed, as tradition tells us, by the restless Lewis, and the rather moody, saturnine reflective creature depicted by Macready. Mr. Irving's Benedick is, from the first, the manly friend, the gallant soldier, the courteous gentleman — to all save Beatrice who provokes him to wordy combats. We do not remember any representative of the character who so subtly engenders a suspicion that the love which breaks out so suddenly when the trick is played upon him of leading him into the belief that the lady is secretly pining for him, was, after all, only the bursting forth of a flame that has long been smouldering. This, it is true, must be found by the spectator for himself. Nowhere throughout the play however did the performance reach so high a level as in the powerfully dramatic colloquy in the scene between Benedick and Beatrice in the church. Miss Terry swiftly passes through the whole gamut of Beatrice's deep yet wayward—frolicsome yet earnestly tender nature."

"*Much Ado About Nothing* must be pronounced the most successful of Mr. Irving's Shakespearian revivals," says the *Athenæum*, "and Benedick is probably the best Shakespearian performance Mr. Irving has as yet supplied. In eccentric comedy he has few equals. No actor of whom the present generation has any knowledge or preserves any recollection can claim to have so thoroughly entered into the character or charged it with equal vitality * * * it has much fancy and variety and attains distinct intellectual elevation. Miss Terry's Beatrice, in the stronger scenes reached a high point of excellence. * * Few Benedicks could be found to resist such conjuration as was supplied." "Mr. Irving was made for Benedick," says the *Academy*, "or Benedick for Mr. Irving. He plays it with the keenest sense of enjoyment and appreciation, and with that authority of interpretation which comes most readily when a man possesses the agreeable consciousness that the authority will be recognized and accepted. The element of satire in the part — the conception of a robust humanity boasting its own strength and swayed, even while it boasts, by the lightest of feminine charms — is much in his own humor. The chivalry of the character suits him, and so does the graciousness of the character, and

its quiet and self-analytical wit. He is excellent in speech, and as excellent in by-play. It is seldom that a success is so unmistakable, though, in this case we cannot consider it surprising. The character fits him, as Beatrice fits Miss Ellen Terry. Nearly all that she can do quite perfectly she can do in Beatrice; of all her best notes only one is missing and that is the note of extreme pathos. So it is that Mr. Irving and Miss Terry fit their parts perfectly." *(Academy).*

We ourselves, let us add, rate Miss Terry's Beatrice higher than her partner's Benedick. There was indeed no lack of grace and humor in his performance but the grace lacked finish — at first at any rate, it has perhaps improved by practice — and the humor was in consequence a little clumsy. In the garden scene we felt a touch of the school-boy — a *digging in the ribs* of the audience — that was certainly below the usual mark of Mr. Irving's tact. But we saw it while it was yet new to the Lyceum stage and Mr. Irving has the magnanimous grace of never being too proud to improve.

In *Dramatic Notes,* by Austin Brereton, a very good account of the play and the gorgeous set scenes ends with an appreciative comment on the sound judgment which Mr. Irving has once more

shown in giving the real story of the play — the slander of Hero — due prominence. Irving and Miss Terry can afford to do this; still, the sacrifice on his part is less than in *The Merchant of Venice* where Shylock slinks off humiliated and leaves Portia to celebrate her triumphs at Belmont; or, in other words, leaves Miss Terry in possession of the stage. This is as it should be; it is conscientious art and the very best taste.

In short *Much Ado About Nothing* is an almost ideal performance, as it is an ideal play; to live through it is an experience that elevates the imagination and leaves a remembrance in the mind which is as delightful as itself — even though the critical faculty may refuse to be altogether silenced.

It might have held the stage till the scenery was a ruin and the dresses rags, but it was taken off early this spring in order that the company might once more go through a series of performances of the nine other plays that Mr. Irving is bringing bodily to America. "Bringing" very literally, for the scenery and properties constitute some tons' weight of bales and cases, and the dresses alone fill a considerable amount of luggage. The first of the old pieces thus rehearsed, as we may say, for the American audiences, was *The Lyon's Mail*,

and the revival was particularly successful. Miss Terry, with the frank generosity of a true artist, plays the small part of Jeannette. "Its success was almost phenomenal; West-End play-goers, who commonly scorn the melodrama, crowd the stalls; and yet we cannot but feel that such characters are unworthy of Mr. Irving's talents when we think of him as almost, if not quite, the sole competent representative of the 'legitimate' muse." Melodrama however is a fact; on the stage a great fact and not without a place in literature. "It is a form of stage work into which, if genuine artists engage in it, art may largely enter," and Irving's performance in *The Lyon's Mail*, "invests its somewhat obvious contrivances for harrowing and surprising the spectator, with a dignity that is not strictly their own."

Mr. Irving's benefit and leave-taking of the London public took place on the 28th of July. It is the end of history, so far as he is concerned for the present. But some weeks previously a party of his friends and admirers had given him a dinner, and the American Minister in London so far honored him as to postpone his customary entertainment in honor of the day — it was the Fourth of July — in order to be present. Mr. Irving's health was proposed by the Lord Chief Justice in

a long speech, in which he did equal justice to their guest's qualities as an artist and to his personal merits, his generosity, liberality, and unselfishness in those business relations which fill up the larger part of a manager's life. Mr. Irving, in returning thanks, spoke with eager anticipation of his visit to America; "I am not going among strangers," he said, "I am going among friends;" and in expressing in feeling terms his sense of the honor done him, he added the thanks of his coadjutor Miss Terry, who was sitting in the gallery surrounded by relations and friends, and to whom the chairman had alluded in his speech.

For his last appearance and benefit on the 28th of July, Mr. Irving secured the assistance of his faithful friend Mr. Toole and of Mr. Sims Reeves who, after the "Death of Nelson," sang, "You'll Remember Me." He himself appeared as Eugene Aram and as Doricourt. It was "with sincere emotion," as we can well believe, that he took leave of an audience many of whom were his personal friends and all, probably without an exception, his hearty admirers and well-wishers. He spoke, in somewhat tremulous accents we are told, as follows:

"Ladies and gentlemen—I have often had to say 'Good-bye' to you on occasions like this, but never has

the task been so difficult as it is to-night, for we are about to have a longer separation than we have ever had before. Soon an ocean will roll between us, and it will be a long, long time before we can hear your heart-stirring cheers again. It is some consolation, though, to think that we shall carry with us across the Atlantic the good-will of many friends who are here to-night, as well as of many who are absent. Here — in this theatre — have we watched the growth of your great and generous sympathy with our work, which has been more than rewarded by the abundance of your regard, and you will believe me when I say I acutely feel this parting with those who have so steadily and staunchly sustained me in my career. Not for myself alone I speak, but on behalf of my comrades, and especially for Miss Ellen Terry. Her regret at parting with you is equal to mine. You will, I am sure, miss her — as she will certainly miss you. But we have our return to look forward to, and it will be a great pride to us to come back with the stamp of the favor and the good-will of the American people, which, believe me, we shall not fail to obtain. The 2d of next June will I hope see us home with you again. We shall have acted in America for six months, from October 29th, to the 29th of the following April, during which time we shall have played in some forty cities. Before our departure we shall appear in Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Liverpool, from whence we start upon our expedition. This theatre will not be closed long; for on the 1st of September a lady will appear before you whose beauty and talent have made her the favorite of

America from Maine to California — Miss Mary Anderson, a lady to whom I am sure you will give the heartiest English welcome. That is a foregone conclusion. You will, I know, extend the same welcome to my friend Lawrence Barrett, the famous American actor, who will appear here in the early part of next year. It is a delight to me, as it must have been to you, to have had my friend Sims Reeves here to-night, and I hope that the echo of the words so beautifully sung by him will linger in your memories, and that you will remember me; and it has also been a great delight to have had my old friend Toole and my young friend Herbert Reeves here to-night. At all times it is a happy thing to be surrounded by friends, and especially on such an occasion as this. And now, ladies and gentlemen, I must say 'Good-bye.' I can but hope that in our absence some of you will miss us; and I hope that when we return you will all be here, or some few of you at least, to welcome us back. From one and all, to one and all, with full and grateful and hopeful hearts, I wish you lovingly and respectfully, 'Good-bye.'"

"Good-bye!" was echoed, in the fullest and deepest sense of the little word, by his English audience. It is our good fortune to be able instead to say:

"Welcome!"

CHAPTER IV.

MR. IRVING'S INDIVIDUALITY AND INFLUENCE. HIS SPEECHES AND WRITINGS. HIS SOCIAL QUALITIES.

A NOTICE of Henry Irving would be incomplete without some account of his personal appearance, though it no doubt is familiar to some who will read these pages, and ere long those who have not yet seen him will seize the opportunity now offered them on this side of the Atlantic. He has of course been repeatedly photographed in his own country and it is to be hoped that he will afford our own admirable artists many opportunities of recording his appearance in the parts he plays here. At the same time the most pleasing presentment of his features is in a part in which we shall not see him in America: that of Vanderdecken. This is, we think, the most artistic likeness we have ever seen of him; the make-up, which is in no respect a disguise—no disguise can mask Henry Irving—brings out the best features of his face, and the broad hat conceals his most



HENRY IRVING AS "VANDERDECKEN."

conspicuous defect: his flat and by no means well-shaped head. The singularity of its form startles us, so to speak, out of realizing that it is ugly; but when the furry hat worn by Vanderdecken disguises the disproportion of the head and face we feel at once what the defect is that we miss. In point of fact it is hard to pronounce Irving a *handsome man*, though his face is so finely and powerfully moulded that it is far from being plain and still further from being commonplace. The features, without being bony, suggest a solid framework under the flesh, of a somewhat animal type: a broad jaw, a low skull and the eyes set close under the brows. On the other hand the facial angle is noble in profile and the temples wide. The muscles that clothe the bones are fine and mobile; the eyes not large but expressive; the lips thin, firm, and remarkably free from sensuousness; the ears not too small, but set rather too low on the head.

One grace Mr. Irving has that is almost matchless — certainly unmatched on the English stage — hands of extraordinary beauty; not finikin, feminine hands, but such as might be regarded as the typical model of what the Creator meant the hand of man to be. Whether he lightly caresses Ophelia's hair or grips Iago's throat, fondly counts

his gold as Mathias, or clutches his chair in *The Iron Chest,* lifts them in tremulous anguish or gallantly waves them in a minuet — their admirable form, play and grip are an accessory of singular value and would give him distinction and elegance, even if he had no greater qualities. He dresses his hands, it may be added, with no less care than his face or figure; the lace he wears in Charles I. lends them the sentimental refinement of a Vandyke painting, while in Louis XI. he half covers them in a clumsy cuff that gives them the pinched bloodless character of a sordid old man's hands.

There are moments, however, when the beauty of his expression entirely glorifies his face — moments in Hamlet, in Charles I., in Richelieu; but the slightly satirical humor which lifts a corner of his mouth, and sometimes gives his very polish of manner an accent of cynicism, would seem to be the natural expression of his mind — as it is with many men who have analyzed human nature, and perforce tasted the bitterest depths of their own.

This is an experience without which no man can become such an artist as Irving undoubtedly is — though a man may go through it too, without becoming an artist. Nothing but a sincere study of human motive and its manifold outcome

can afford the materials for such a synthesis as is necessary for the conception of the characters of Othello, Shylock, Eugene Aram, Iago, or even Benedick. In every part he plays, whatever Mr. Irving may do to jar on our preconceptions, he always has the power which comes of *wholeness*, so far as his own part is concerned; we feel, when we have seen him act, not so much that we like or dislike him, as that we agree or disagree with the scheme of character he has constructed out of the materials in his hands.

He makes up with admirable care and skill. Merely to see Mr. Irving's make-up in every part he plays is enough to show how conscientious his study must be. M. Jules Claretie found him dressing for Richelieu with three or four photographs and prints of portraits of the Cardinal; and for Louis XI. he studied history and romance alike with the greatest care. In 1877, when he was preparing to produce *The Lyon's Mail* we are told that he went to the Derby, as much to study the aspect of rascals of the Dubosc type as to see the race; while he adopted for Vanderdecken a sort of Rembrandt costume and in Charles I. looked like a Vandyke come to life. And yet, in one sense, Mr. Irving is not what play-goers of the old school, at any rate, could call a great actor: he

never succeeds in disguising himself for an instant. He dresses Irving for a part and Irving is before you with an individuality far too powerful to be masked. Herein, it must be said lie a source of strength and a source of weakness, and while pointing out the first, it is not unfair to insist on the second. It is a source of strength inasmuch as it is the secret of the charm by which he holds his audience; of weakness inasmuch as it is a shortcoming in art. Irving plays entirely and solely to the audience; this, at any rate, is his rule, though some exceptions will be mentioned. This, let us say it at once, is a flaw in his art *quâ* art, and there are very few actors with whom such a scheme of work would succeed; it is a system similar in kind, though utterly dissimilar in style and degree, to that which was used with such skill and success by Ravel (in the *Rue de la Lune* for instance) and by other French actors in farce and low comedy on the boards of the Palais Royal theatre in Paris; and Mr. Irving's masterful and captivating individuality has enabled him to transfer it to his own far higher sphere of work, to refine and elevate it, till the influence he exerts has the force of a spell. But the consequence might have been predicted by any one who could have forseen the channel

into which his peculiar talent was destined to flow. Only too often does Mr. Irving act his part while he does not act the play. He thrills, or touches or terrifies the spectator by means which we know, on reflection, could not produce the effects they are supposed to have had on the other personages in the story. To this we owe those grotesque mannerisms which deface some of his finest work, those descents of tone — not of voice alone but of sentiment, not merely of gesture but of impulse — which would shock the public, and do shock some old-fashioned spectators, if it were not for the mysterious impression they produce of self-revelation in the actor. Instances might be given from *Richelieu* (at the end of act IV.), from *The Merchant of Venice* (Act III., Scene 4, Irving's acting edition), and from his Iago (Act I. of *Othello*).

"Mr. Irving's performance of the hero presents many artistic qualities, marred, however, by excess of effort and elaboration and by too manifest a consciousness of the presence of the audience." So wrote Mr. Dutton Cook when speaking of *Philip* and there is still truth in the criticism.

Irrespective of the want of appreciation of his stage, as a world in itself, which is betrayed by this indifference to the logical results of his per-

sonality on the development of the action, the constant recurrence of the same forms of bathos (quite independently of peculiarities of walk and accent) would suffice to stamp the man Irving whatever dress he might wear; and it is this never-escaped-from identity that makes the question of a part "suiting him" a prominent and important one. This is not for a moment meant to convey the idea that Irving *cannot act*. Nothing could be more utterly false. No actor on the English stage assumes a part more admirably. When he plays Richelieu or Louis XI. we feel that Irving, as we see the man, might very fitly have been a cardinal or a king; while in *The Bells* and *Richard III.* we see no reason to doubt that he might have been the villain he represents.

"Mr. Irving presents a most conscientious, artistic, and elaborate study of the character," says Mr. Dutton Cook, in 1878, of *Louis XI.* "He is more senile perhaps than other representatives of Louis have been; the quavering note of age and decrepitude is heard even in his strongest and boldest utterances; the hand of death seems to oppress him even from his first entrance. But Mr. Irving is true to his own conception of his part, and allowing for a trifling excess of accent now and then, when it is deemed expedient to

insist on some special point, his performance is throughout very masterly, even and consistent, subtle and finished. There is no neglect of the small delicate touches which give completeness to a picture, while the stronger portions of the design are executed with supreme breadth and boldness. Mr. Irving boasts the great actor's gift, or art, of at once riveting the attention of his audience; presently his influence extends more and more, till each word, and glance, and action of this strange king he represents — so grotesque of aspect, so cat-like of movement, so ape-like of gesture, so venomous in his spite, so demoniac in his rage, and meanwhile so paltry and vile and cringing a poltroon — are watched and followed with a nervous absorption that has something about it of fascination or even of terror. The performance reaches its climax perhaps in the king's paroxysms of fear after Nemours' assault upon him; the actor's passionate rendering of this scene, his panic-stricken cries and moans, prayers, threats, and the spectacle of physical prostration that ensues, affect the audience very powerfully. The death of the king is elaborately treated, but with no undue straining after the horrible. In these distinct and individual impersonations Mr. Irving is seen to signal advantage and can afford

comparison with the best artists of his class. There is probably no actor now living who could present such an interpretation of Louis XI. as Mr. Irving offers us."

When we try to discuss the vexed—and, it must be honestly said, vexing—question of Mr. Irving's mannerisms, judgment and justice give us pause. That they exist is only too obvious and certain; that they repel many who see him for the first time so completely as to defeat his charm is indisputable; and his sincerest admirers will perhaps to their dying day, and in their moments of tenderest remembrance—for we all think tenderly of our past enjoyments—wish that he had been free from them. Still we must remember that the great men who are gone are said to have been just as much to blame in this respect. Betterton's gestures were stiff and limited; Garrick's foes could give a very satirical caricature of the action and accent that enthralled his admirers; Edmund Kean even was not perfectly free and natural till fire and passion lifted him above himself. No passion ever did this with his son and Macready is said to have been even colder, drier, and narrower. However, to use a homely proverb, "two blacks do not make white;" mannerism may be defined as the indulgence, or perhaps the cul-

tivation of a peculiarity which, being characteristic of the actor, cannot by any possibility be equally characteristic of every man he feigns to be; and such mannerism is, beyond a doubt, a fault, a blot, and a disfigurement. Such eccentricities of detail it must be owned, with the deepest regret, have always been Mr. Irving's rock ahead. It is an ungracious task to point out the defects of an actor who has given us so much and such exalted pleasure; whose ideal of art, as we know, is so high; whose insight is so keen and whose powers of expression are so great. Small blame is it indeed to any artist that he should fall short of his aim when that aim is the highest; but the truth is that Mr. Irving has in some degree allowed himself to be spoilt. His critics from his earliest days, as we have seen, have warned him while they have praised him; meanwhile special circumstances have given him extraordinary popularity, and it is not perhaps strange that he has been only too ready to overlook in himself the faults that his public have condoned. Nevertheless it is a fact that Henry Irving's English is not the tongue universally spoken in England, still less in America; that a stride complicated with a drag, which may be thought picturesque in Hamlet and characteristic in Richelieu, is grotesque in

Charles I. and intolerable in Romeo; and that certain airs of supreme ease which are perfectly fitting in melodrama or comedy are ill-advised, to say the least, in even the comedy parts of a tragedy—for instance, when Iago sits on a table and picks his teeth with his dagger.

The Athenaeum of October 2nd, 1875, has some remarks on Mr. Irving in Macbeth which unfortunately apply though with much qualification to almost all his parts; still the faults pointed out were no doubt most conspicuous in Macbeth (which the present writer has never seen).

"Mr. Irving must learn that his mannerisms have developed into evils so formidable that they will, if not checked, end by ruining his career. His slow pronunciation and his indescribable elongation of syllables bring the whole occasionally near burlesque. * * * Mr. Irving has youth, intelligence, ambition, zeal, and resolution. These things are sacrificed to vices of style which have strengthened with the actor's successes, and like all weeds of ill growth, have obtained successive development. It is impossible to preserve the music of Shakespeare if words of one syllable are to be stretched out to the length of five or six." In 1878, again "Mr. Irving's faults of elocution are—or rather were, for they are growing less—

summed up in an eccentric habit of selecting for special emphasis some syllables and words possessing no perceptible claim to any such distinction, and of giving to such syllables and words a degree of quantity, as distinguished from mere accent, altogether unknown to any system of prosody," and even in 1880, "Mr. Irving still delights in abrupt transitions from a slow and somewhat artificial delivery to almost startling by familiar conversational tones which, apart from the obvious shallowness of acts of this kind, are apt to grate on the ear as something incongruous in plays full of poetical beauty and subtlety of thought." (*Daily News*).

An acute and thoughtful critic of "The English Stage" in *Scribner's Magazine* (Jan. 1881) observes, with some little exaggeration of the truth: "Mr. Irving's peculiarities and eccentricities of speech are so strange * * * that the spectator who desires to be in sympathy with him finds himself confronted with a bristling hedge of difficulties;" and though we cannot subscribe to all this writer's opinions, we entirely agree when he says that "in Louis XI. his defects (that is to say his mannerisms) to a certain degree stand him in stead of qualities."

The very converse of this was true in Vander-

decken — in which Mr. Irving owned that he felt that his public were not "with him." One of the chief reasons of its failure was the ghastly — meant to be ghostly — monotony and exaggeration of manner which Mr. Irving infused into it. Theoretically he was right — theoretically, be it said, he hardly ever fails to be right — for what character can be attributed to a wandering and God-forsaken spirit but that of the very demon of melancholy; but such a part is not Irving's forte and he failed to make mannered melancholy an interesting psychological study, though he made the spectral captain an astonishingly picturesque personage.

Shylock throughout is less defaced by mannerisms than many of his parts; partly, no doubt because the assumption of the character necessitates a strong individualization: in the trial scene Irving again seems to be under the dominion of passion too completely to be thinking of his audience and his acting is magnificent. Revenge, inherited revenge for centuries of insult and oppression, fires his eye and whets his knife, and lurks under his scowling brow as he quits the scene, leaving love and youth triumphant.

Elaborate *business* may not be the highest, but it is one of the most fascinating parts of the actor's art; and, given a broad grasp of the play

first and then of the character to be represented, it has quite as good a right to be considered next in importance as a good make-up or appropriate costume. In Irving's acting it sometimes perhaps holds a too prominent place, but many instances might be quoted where it supplements the general conception and illustrates the situation.

In the second act of Richard III., Irving has one of those delicately humorous bits of *business* which captivate the attention of his audience so completely that criticism — whether praise or blame — is lost in sympathy. When the Duke of Gloster comes into the room in the palace where the Duchess of York, and Queen Elizabeth are bewailing their griefs, he says to his mother:

> "Humbly on my knee
> I crave your blessing."

and Irving, with a refinement of mockery, lightly spreads his handkerchief on the ground at her feet before kneeling to her. This little touch is thrown in with such finish that it is not till he rises again with the ironical *aside* that follows that its ribald insolence is made clear to the spectator. In *The Bells*, when Mathias unties his money-bag to count out Annette's dowry, he mechanically puts the string round his neck not to lose it, and then

snatches it off again with a shiver; and again, in the scene with Christian, note the apparently mechanical action of carefully putting a coal into the stove, of which he opens the door just as the *gendarme* puts forward the hypothesis that the body of the murdered Jew must have been cast into a lime-kiln and burnt. Then in playing Iago, when Desdemona, in the first act, is to be brought to confront her father and Othello, Irving, by a gesture, puts Cassio forward as the most fitting messenger, and affects a little surprise when Othello bids him go himself, as "knowing the place."

In the last act of Louis XI. there is extraordinary finish, and suggestiveness of senility and wilfulness in the way in which the king's trembling fingers refuse to hold the sceptre, just after he has asserted himself to be "strong and capable."—"An original and ingenious artifice," Mr. Dutton Cook calls it. But we say much more.

Touches of this sort supply a clue to the undercurrent of motive, by which the spectator is almost unconsciously initiated into the secrets of the character as the actor has understood it. They are not its very substance but they are nevertheless an assurance of individuality which, so long as they strictly illustrate the *character* and do not

betray the actor are not merely suitable but invaluable, and the highest art. They are, in fact, the very antithesis and opposite of mannerisms.

In Hamlet he is perhaps less of the prince than the philosopher, but it is in one scene especially of that play that we find one of those exceptional passages where Irving sinks his individuality in the situation with really exquisite effect. This is in the third act, where Ophelia restores the jewels to her royal lover; a good deal in the detail of the conception is here original and novel, but it is the performance that is so lovely as to leave no loop-hole for criticism. The exalted chivalry of Hamlet's nature which bids him suppress a passion that must find vent, and at last bursts out in a speech verging on brutality from the sheer impossibility of further self-control, is rendered with a delicacy, fullness, and dignity broken by anguish which make it one of the most touching presentments ever given on the English stage. Here, when Mr. Irving seems to have no thought for any one but Ophelia, he never fails to have his audience with him in breathless and tearless sympathy. His suffering is too supreme at the moment—but we may shed a tear, by stealth, when it is over. Mr. Irving's love-making is not perhaps so lavish and so devoted as was Fechter's for

instance, but it is of a type which appeals as much or more to the reasonable woman — it ought to prove irresistible to our American girls! "It is objected to him," says Mr. Wedmore when speaking of *Iolanthe*, "that he lacks the graces of early youth; but very young lovers are wont to be a good deal occupied with their graces and Mr. Irving as a lover is occupied with his love. He is chivalrous and he is warm, and it is not generally recognized — because he has been seen so little in lovers' parts — that he is chivalrous and warm in a peculiar measure." "Picturesque and chivalrously reverent," are the adjectives applied to his performance of Count Tristan in *Iolanthe* and these two epithets in fact very happily express the features of a class of character that he excels in representing. They apply to his tone and demeanor in fifty situations where tenderness and respect for woman are the key-note and such situations become him well.

The truth is that after all Henry Irving stands on that high place which makes those who watch him, long to see him mount higher; he does his work so well that we long to see it perfect; and only to provoke that desire an artist must be already great. Irving never fails to rouse in the open-minded spectator two of the in-

stincts which human nature finds the keenest pleasure in exercising: sympathy without the pang of real sorrow, and the critical faculty without any responsibility of judgment. *Il donne à réfléchir* the French would say, and there is no more delightful relaxation of mind than such reflection affords. Sometimes, indeed, we cannot help feeling that in elaborating the part he has in some degree misapprehended the play. The potentialities of the man he sets before us are even wider and deeper than the immediate situation demands, but they do not always perfectly account for the development of the action. It is extremely difficult to give an instance of this, as it must depend in some measure on the kind of sympathy he succeeds in evoking in each individual, and one great merit counterbalances the fault: we never feel as if he had ceased acting the instant he is off the stage. On the other hand seeing him act — at any rate in one of his best parts is not a mere evening's recreation ; he has stored our minds with new ideas which we cannot even pronounce a verdict on without doubt or thought. "Mr. Irving's performance one carries away and thinks about," says a sympathetic but acute critic in Macmillan when speaking of his Iago; and this is true of everything he does. "And surely the most pre-

judiced person must admit that to sway the feelings of an audience in such various rôles as Hamlet, Louis XI., Eugene Aram, Shylock, Mathias, and Benedick, a man must possess something more than a few mannerisms and much earnestness. If such a series of performances does not entitle a man to be called a great actor we do not know what does." *(Theatre).*

The English stage was sorely in need of such an actor when Irving first appeared upon it. Montgomery, Dillon, and Melville were far from satisfying the London public. Booth had visited them and Phelps was still preëminent in his best parts; they had Vezin too, an actor who has never been duly appreciated, but these had all failed in what has been spoken of in the introduction as the magic touch of the actor's art: they had not interpreted the spirit of the time, and failing that the tongues of men and of angels would not have availed them. The light comedy of Robertson, as played by the Bancrofts, held possession of London and was the only fashionable form of drama. Henry Irving was young, clever, and resolute; he had, to a considerable ex-

tent gauged human nature in the provinces; he felt that he could not only supply a want, but could make the Londoners want what he could supply—a subtler and a rarer talent.

We easily read between the lines of the critiques on his performances how large a share his individuality has had in his success. His audiences are "charmed, fascinated, spell-bound" in the first instance; intellectual appreciation is postponed, at any rate till the second time of seeing him. "I can always tell when my audience is with me," Mr. Irving has said, and the sheer determination to *have* them with him has no doubt lifted him over many a shoal; the intensity of his will has turned the tide.

This power which Mr. Irving himself calls "the magnetic personality" of an actor, is, it may be added, precisely the same as that which makes a manager. "The art of stage management is a gift," writes Mr. Robert Reece, "a direct gift or inspiration; to be assisted no doubt by experience, but never to be perfunctorily acquired." A manager who has this gift will not only insist on the thorough rehearsal and careful interpretation of the work in hand. He does much more than this. Inspiration, like dulness, is catching; if there be any sort of fuel in the minds of his colleagues the

vital spark in his own fires it and diffuses warmth and glow to the whole, though he may fail to fan it to a flame. *Go*, without which no play — from a tragedy down to the lightest *pièce de circonstance* — can rise above the level of amateurish monotony, largely depends on the impulsive power of the manager, and the little word is a wide one as regards the balance of qualities it presupposes in one man. Mr. Irving — so say all who have worked with him — is a born manager, and an eminently successful one. He is not, to be sure, his own stage-manager nominally; Mr. Loveday and Mr. Bram Stoker assisting him; but he is the moving spirit, and undoubtedly gives the impetus that produces the *Go*. "Any one who goes to see the plays Mr. Irving performs in such varied succession must admit, however strong his prejudices or sentiments against Mr. Irving's acting may be, that they are produced with the greatest care, and with something very like perfection as regards all the accessories. The patience and intelligence he brings to bear on every detail in the rehearsals, thinking nothing too trivial for the exercise of care, taking as much pains with the supernumeraries as with the principal actors, are manifest in that general completeness and dramatic effectiveness which are recognized by all the spectators,

but the cause of which is only known to a few."

When the manager is also the principal actor a temptation lies open to him which it requires a gracious and a magnanimous spirit alike to resist: that namely to act his part rather than the play. We have said that Mr. Irving has occasionally erred in this direction, but we cannot, in his case, attribute it to any want of magnanimity. It is only that he is apt to carry his psychological study beyond and outside the situations in which the character is revealed to the audience and to the other characters in the play. In such parts as Shylock, Louis XI., Mathias, and Eugene Aram, the result is splendid; in some others it overweights the part with meaning — or so we venture to think.

There are plays, and they are the finest, in which the situation is the resultant of all the forces of outer circumstance in collision with all the forces of a man's nature; but when the critics tell us that Irving's Claude Melnotte is "too virile," that his Modus is not pitched in quite the right key, that his Romeo is not altogether satisfactory, and when we try to find the reason, it irresistibly strikes us this is not because he *looks* too old — that would be easily remedied with a face and figure so

alert and plastic—but because he overcharges the character with experience. Not with the experience of the actor, but with the experience of the man. It is an old saying that: "no actor can learn to act Romeo till he is too old to act it," and this is the secret of the paradox. By the time the actor knows enough the man knows too much, and to render the character truthfully he must, for the time, forget it.

In an article in *The Saturday Review*, written early in 1876, we find a remark which throws so direct a light on our own view that Irving is essentially a man of his time, that we cannot forbear quoting it: "We must allow that there is something morbid and unwholesome in both *The Bells* and *Eugene Aram*, though the representation of their agonies is calculated rather to deter, than to encourage any imitation of their example. We have merely a dismal study in the morbid anatomy of crime, without subtlety of character or anything to elevate and exhilarate the mind."

"Without subtlety of character,"—No. The critic here contradicts himself; if this were lacking there would be no *anatomy* properly speaking. It would be mere hacking and hewing, not dissecting. Now Irving's work is dissecting; it is this very display of morbid psychology which is

so thoroughly nineteenth century, and it is this power of analysis and synthesis which enables him to gratify one of the appetites of the day. That he does so in a purely moral way and never has pandered to the baser curiosity and sensual sympathies of his audience is his great merit. He has dignified remorse but not crime; he has clung to the beauty of truth — not only in accuracy of delineation, but in sincerity of purpose, and to the beauty of purity alike in the spirit of his acting and in his choice of plays.

But Mr. Irving always carries his standard high and defends his colors bravely. Being invited to address a meeting at a conference held in the East of London in 1877 he spoke at considerable length on the moral value and far from irreligious tendencies of the English stage. "It is also a sign of the times," he said, "that you have invited an actor to read a paper before you. * * * Reflect how little the masses of our great towns are under the active influence of religion * * * and comparatively how much they frequent the minor theatres. Much in these theatres is vulgar, and there may even be things that are deleterious. Nor would I deny that even good teachings come disfigured on to the minor stage — aye, and on the major also — as they often do in

pulpits and books. None the less, however, is it true that the main stream of dramatic sentiment in all veins is pure, kindly, righteous, and in a sense, religious. * * * I claim for histrionic art affinity with much that is beneficent and elevating in religion. The stage must not be homiletic or didactic. If there be any who are for veiling from human sight all the developments of evil, they indeed must turn from the theatre door and desire to see the footlights put out; but they must also close Shakespeare, avoid Fielding, Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot * * * and on the stage, as in the noblest poetry and teaching, there is to be found every refining influence known to mankind — bright lights for guidance, sweet words of encouragement, comprehended even by the most ignorant — glowing pictures of virtue and devotion — which bring the world of high thoughts and bright lives into communion and fellowship with the sphere of simple, or perhaps coarse, day-to-day existence."

If space allowed the whole address would be well worth quoting; it is a worthy exposition of the duties and the influence of the stage. In commenting on it a writer in *The Theatre* (May 8th, 1877), says: "The actor was addressing a society connected by special designation with the Church.

The times indeed are changed! Only in the last century Junius addressed David Garrick as *thou vagabond*,"—as he was in fact, and as every actor still is by the law and statute of England! There has, no doubt been a marked expansion of sympathy for the stage, under every aspect, in England during the last fifteen years, and during the last ten Mr. Irving has had considerable influence in directing the flow of sympathy into a wholesome channel. Some of it runs in driblets of not unexceptionable taste—burlesque is popular, very popular in London; but in every great city there must be some vent for the animal spirits of the young and ignorant; and the finish with which these frothy works are mounted frequently justifies their success. But in England, as with us, there is a steady demand for work of a superior stamp and many of the West-end theatres provide nothing of a lower class than domestic drama, some of them adhering consistently to the higher walks of comedy and tragedy. The general tendency is upwards and this is partly due to the immediate influence of Irving who has in this respect handed down the good traditions of the Kembles, Macready, and Charles Kean.

In the speech above quoted he very justly observed that an evening spent by a laboring man

even in an inferior theatre, was better than four hours of drinking in a public-house; and he might have added that among the upper classes it was a more intelligent amusement — to put it at the lowest — than the constant card-playing at which their grandparents lost their time, temper, and money.

With some reason, we may think that the revival of the old English dramatic literature — and in particular of the romantic play of the Elizabethans — which has recently set in, is due in great measure to the serious exertions of one actor of liberal education, critical discernment and delicate taste. To the efforts towards the redemption of the stage made by Mr. Irving and those who act with him, is due the interest which for some few years past has been manifested in Shakespearian play. That the interest for which we have to thank the actor is wholesome in its influence is a statement needing no proof; that it is intense is shown by the circumstance that in the consideration of the plays each disputant still contests every nice discrimination of character, not with the impartiality of one who sits in judgment on the metaphysical accuracy of the creation of an author's fancy, but with the warm partisanship of one who claims kindred with the imaginary

personages, and a right to know them better than another.

Mr. Irving speaks and writes with facility and when his subject is the defense or rather eulogy of the stage, the drama, and histrionic art, he speaks with warmth and writes with elegance. The addresses spoken at Northampton, Perry Barr, and Edinburgh, are full of cogent persuasion, and his last published article, "Shakespeare on the stage and in the study," is really brilliant both in argument and in style. He has also written papers of abstract study and of personal defence for various journals and periodicals. To the *Nineteenth Century*, a London monthly, he long ago contributed some "*Actor's Notes.*" The first of these on the "Third Murderer in Macbeth," though the point it deals with is not perhaps very important in elucidating the text to the reader, is of technical value to the actor and stage-manager as bearing on a practical matter of probability in the development of the action of the play. The second of these "*Actor's Notes,*" published in May, 1877, is of the highest interest as a clue to Mr. Irving's reading of the complex mystery of Hamlet's character and his relations to Ophelia. The third is a more strictly historical discussion of the traditions and practice of several actors in their treatment of the

scene in Hamlet where he upbraids his mother for her faithlessness to his father's memory. "It may," he says, "be interesting to the public to receive occasionally from an actor some explanation of the theories which he embodies in his own impersonations, or wishes to see incorporated in the unwritten constitution of his art;" and he proceeds to give his reasons for discarding the use either of full-length portraits or of miniatures in his reading of the passage:

"Look here, upon this picture, and on this."

"The stage," said Mr. Irving at Northampton in 1878, "is ruled by traditions compared with which the laws of the Medes and Persians were elastic; but I suppose it is possible, even in these degenerate days, to throw some new light on the poet's meaning."

In the *Theatre* for July, 1879, we find a well-written article comparing the efforts of Mr. Irving, single-handed, with the results of the time-honored traditions of the Comédie Française in Paris. The members of that Society had been recently acting in England, and the admirable results of

their scheme of working were no doubt very conspicuous. But the writer in the *Theatre* maintained, and we think not unsuccessfully, that in every point which could be supposed to depend on the constitution of the Society — perfection of rehearsal, propriety of cast, and finish of "business" — the performances at the Lyceum could well hold their own. The necessity for a National School for Dramatic Art, for a *Conservatoire*, for a subsidized or at any rate for a chartered Theatre, has been warmly and wearisomely discussed in England and the subject is as far as ever from being settled. Every travelled American has seen the performances at the famous Paris theatre and may judge for himself of the relative merits of the training there and in our own best play-houses; the question as regards London concerns us here only so far as it concerns Mr. Irving. If ever an actor was qualified by patient experience to speak of the processes of histrionic training it is a man who has so long and so diligently studied the art. Little of the drill needed to cultivate the actor's instincts for his art — given those instincts of course — "can be got in a mere training school, but all of it will come forth, more or less fully armed, from the actor's brain in the process of learning his art by practice," says Mr. Irving. We

conceive that Mr. Irving was hardly so explicit here as he might have been. "The proposition that young actors are to be pitchforked on to the stage and learn all these things in the presence and at the cost of audiences would be absurd enough," says the *Saturday Review*, "and we can hardly suppose that this is what Mr. Irving intended." Mr. Irving we are sure did *not* mean that beginners should go through the goose step and awkward squad drill of their art in public performances of Hamlet or Othello, but we are very sure nevertheless that he is right. Receptiveness is one of the first qualities needed in an actor; he must study from life as he grows older and he can hardly learn the rudiments by any better method than by watching, nay even imitating, actors of eminence and thus learning what he has to work with. "Acting like every other art has its mechanism," says Mr. Irving;* but some very thoughtful writers seem to overlook the fact that seeing the mechanism at work is at the bottom of all stage training — watching how other actors use their means and experimenting on oneself as to what means of voice, facial expression or breadth of gesture — one is blest with by nature, can mas-

* In a short preface to a translation of "Talma on the Actor's Art." London, Bickus & Bush.

ter by study or — on the other hand — can never hope to acquire. The *Saturday Review* goes on to remark that "in the Conservatoire at Paris the actors are certainly taught how to enunciate, how to emphasize, how to move well and effectively " but what then? — if this is all a generation of machines will be the result and not of actors.

"The lamentation that there are now no schools for actors is a very idle one. Every actor in full employment gets plenty of schooling, for the best schooling is practice." So spoke Mr. Irving at Edinburgh in 1881. But a critic in *Macmillan's Magazine* had an answer for him: "No one knows better than Mr. Irving that every actor is not always in full employment. * * * And who has now to pay for such schooling as Mr. Irving advocates, as too many of our young actors only get? What of us, the poor public — the *vile corpus* on whom these painful experiments are made?" Here again we think is a critic who has failed to understand that it is Mr. Irving's own experience that leads him to speak thus. The question we think is past disputing as to whether such a course of training is the best or not — the real point and a far more vital question now, is whether the school which we, like Mr. Irving, think so much the best still exists. The system of long

runs on one hand and touring with companies on the other is we fear sapping it at the root. Mr. Irving graduated in it, nay has come out first wrangler; but he must pardon us for pointing out that the training which one of his own young subordinates may get from seeing him play Romeo, Hamlet, Shylock, what not, for weeks together and playing under him — even if he should rise from figuring as Bernardo to performing Horatio or Bassanio — has absolutely no relation either as mental education, or practical experience or, as we might say, moral training, to the schooling that contributed to make him what he is. He knows— no one better — that catching a manner is not acquiring a method; that the precious grace of due subordination will not carry an actor to the top of the tree unless it is supplemented by a variety of practice. Some little time since an actor was announced as "a pupil of Mr. Irving's," but Mr. Irving repudiated him mercilessly. "I never had a pupil," he wrote to the *Theatre*, "and I never shall have a pupil."

We entirely agree with Mr. Frederick Wedmore, one of the most judicious of living dramatic critics, when he says: "Very long runs are, in the main, injurious to theatrical art. They tend, generally, to confirm and exaggerate mannerisms, even where

they do not breed carelessness. They deprive the player for the time of his variety and sometimes permanently of his flexibility. They are apt to make of the comedian a comic actor. They encourage the vice of the specialist, a vice which afflicts all the arts," and which, we may add is more vicious in that of acting than in any other. The mania for expensive mounting is of course at the bottom of long runs. A play costing from 5,000 to 8,000 dollars to put upon the stage must run or it means ruin. "But a Shakespearian play or even a brilliant 18th century comedy needs but a moderate outlay in stage mounting, and perhaps"—Mr. Wedmore goes on to say, "we should not be far wide of the mark if we said that the art of acting in the greater drama is never submitted to its severest and final test until there is no opportunity for surprise or unmeasured admiration at the art of the scene-painter or decorator, and at the knowledge of the antiquary." This, we know, is not Mr. Irving's opinion.

Mr. Burnand thinks that there is "as good a chance now as ever for the actor of ordinary talent." So far we agree with him. But even the man who "has it in him" needs to be fully trained as an accomplished gentleman to figure well on the stage. Of course it is immaterial whether he

acquires it by imitation and practice or by regular schooling, but somehow or somewhere he must learn to move his limbs and speak with finish; he must fence, dance, and have a knowledge of artistic effect in make-up. We believe a good theatre is better for all this than "the quackery of teachers." "The career of Mr. Irving," says the *Academy* in 1874, "may be adduced in support of the theory * * that, in spite of many disadvantages, a provincial theatre is an actor's best training place. * * * Not a few of the best players, even of the contemporary Theatre, first trod the boards in parts of any importance at that old Bristol play-house which Garrick used to praise so warmly. Mr. Irving, we believe, acted chiefly in the North."

"It is pleasant reflection, alike for those who have urged and those who have feared the establishment of a state theatre, that should Mr. Irving's prosperity last and should his endeavors retain their present direction, most of the good, with some of the possible evil, arising from any Government interference will be secured. A *Conservatoire* will it is true, still be wanted: but it is hard to see how, in any subsidized theatre we could confidently look for a worthier selection of plays, for more perfect stage-presentation, or for more earnest art

than are given and promised us at the Lyceum * * Mr. Irving has only to go on as he has begun to make the Lyceum Theatre a nationl institution, not by a vote granted by Act of Parliament, but by the consensus of opinion amongst those who take most interest in our acted drama as it is, and who have most faith in its future development."

In 1876 when Mr. Irving made his first tour in the provinces it was as "a star," playing his best parts with the staff companies of whom he had once been so earnest and painstaking a member. Miss Isabel Bateman was with him in some towns, but towards the end of the tour she fell ill. His recent tours have been more elaborately organized and he has taken different members of his company to support him.

His vigorous health and energy have carried him through fatigues and anxieties which might have broken down a less determined man; on the other hand successes worthy to be called triumphs have been his reward and encouragement.

In June, 1877, he visited Dublin for one day. He left London on Saturday night after acting at the Lyceum, crossed to Dublin on Sunday, gave a promised reading in Trinity College on Monday, and was in London on Tuesday in time to appear at the usual hour at the Lyceum, which had been

closed for only one night. The day in Dublin was a great success. He was received at the Dean's rooms before proceeding to the Hall of Trinity College where he gave a reading in the afternoon. The selection was intentionally as varied as possible, "from grave to gay, from lively to severe," only reversed; for he began with a humorous poem and went on to passages from Othello and Richard III., ending with Hood's poem of Eugene Aram. "The venerable provost of the college told Mr. Irving that his rendering of this poem reminded him of Edmund Kean in his grandest moments of inspiration." Between the closing of the Lyceum theatre in July, 1878, and its being reopened under his own management in December Irving first took a short holiday — broken, however, by reading for charities, and then made a professional tour in the English provinces. He went to Preston, Liecester, Liverpool, Dublin, Manchester, Greenock, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Sheffield, and Bristol and played to houses crowded not merely with rank and fashion but with critical play-goers who watched him with absorbed interest and sympathy. This again was a starring tour, and in every respect an immense success; the provincial papers wrote of him with more enthusiasm perhaps than judgment but with a zeal that

found an echo in the applause of every audience to whom he played.

In 1879, Mr. Irving gave himself leave of absence from the boards, and paced the deck instead — of a yacht belonging to his constant and appreciative friend the Baroness Burdett Coutts. In 1880 his holiday was a short one for in the winter season he brought out as we have seen *The Corsican Brothers*, *The Cup*, and *The Belle's Stratagem*. The season began early too, before the end of September. Mr. Irving's visits to Ireland and Scotland have usually been the crowning glories of his provincial tours. At Dublin he is always enthusiastically welcomed and in November, 1881, when he and Miss Terry went together to Edinburgh they played to houses, "packed to suffocation," as may be easily imagined when we hear that "thirteen performances were witnessed by thirty thousand persons." It was on the occasion of his being invited to speak at the leading Literary Institution of Edinburgh during his stay that he delivered the address on "The Stage as it is." In 1882 he was again away for a short tour— and now he is about to make a very long one. He has bid his London friends farewell for ten months, promising to meet them again on the 2d of June next year. Mr. Irving is, we know, the most

punctual of men and always keeps his promises. This being the case America must make the most of her opportunities. She will see much to criticise but more—infinitely more — to enjoy.

In his relations to his brother artists Henry Irving shows a generous and magnanimous spirit. His readings and performances for benefits and charities are too many to enumerate. The invidious remark is of course sufficiently trite that these are his best advertisement. We grant that for what it is worth. It does not alter the fact that he gives up his time and exercises his talents for others and always in the most liberal and gracious manner possible, whether it be at the request of some illustrious personage for a public institution, or for the more direct succour of some impoverished or invalided brother in art. And no trouble is too great for him. On February 14th, 1877, being Ash-Wednesday, Mr. Irving gave up his holiday to read gratuitously for the benefit of a charity. The eldest Miss Bateman (Mrs. Crowe) very liberally shared the toil and Macbeth was read, or rather recited without acting—with only such artistic expression as was required to empha-

size the reader's art. As is very usual with Mr. Irving, the construction he gave to some of the sentences by his punctuation startled the more cultured part of his audience "by an ingenuity which is not invariably satisfactory and which finds no confirmation in any text hitherto discovered." The room was crowded with an enthusiastic audience and the actors' liberality duly recognized. Another graceful act on the part of Mr. Irving was his joining the committee to consider the form to be given a memorial to Mr. John Oxenford who for many years had been a popular and successful writer for the stage and a discriminating dramatic critic. In August, 1878, when the Lyceum season ended, before beginning his tour for his own benefit Mr. Irving gave some entertainments for the benefit of various local societies and charities; he read at Northampton in aid of the fund for restoring a church; at Edgbarton he laid the foundation-stone of a public institution and three days afterwards gave a reading at Belfast for a charity. It need hardly be said that gratitude added enthusiasm to the applause he earned on these and many other occasions. In Greenock, in 1878, he was the first to suggest a subscription for the relief of the sufferers by the failure of a great joint-stock bank

and he and Mr. Toole at once gave two performances in aid of the impoverished victims, handing over £730 sterling to the committee.

In 1879 he was one of the first to offer aid at Birmingham, when a fire destroyed the Shakespeare Library, by proposing to give a reading in that town. In June, 1879, he helped in a performance in aid of the Isandula fund as did Mr. Vezin and many other distinguished professionals. In 1881 a bazaar was held for the Perry Beers Institute, and Mr. Irving travelled down to Birmingham and back in the day to open it, "earning the gratitude of the whole profession."

Acting for benefits is a piece of liberality on the "ca' me and I'll ca' thee" principle which every actor is bound to in his turn; but a benefit carried out with the liberality that Mr. Irving showed when he organized a "good night's work" before the retirement of his old friend and supporter Mr. Chippendale, is uncommon even in that very liberal profession. Irving played Hamlet and the veteran actor performed Polonius, and in the speech in which Mr. Chippendale took leave of the public he acknowledged Mr. Irving's generosity and delicacy in the warmest terms, explaining that the whole receipts of the evening had been presented to him "a princely and I believe

unprecedented act of liberality." It was a handsome and graceful acknowledgment to perhaps the oldest actor on the stage, for Mr. Chippendale, who had played with Edmund Kean and Charles Kemble, was then seventy-eight years of age. Mr. Irving had a year or two previously played in *The Two Roses* for his old friend Mr. Belford.

Of far greater importance, however, to the profession at large than any direct act of kindness is the improved position which Mr. Irving's personal influence has contributed to gain for it It is certain that the audiences who have met, not only to hear him speak and to enjoy his readings, but who have frequented his theatre, include a vast number of persons to whom the bare idea of welcoming and listening to an actor would a few years since have been utter abomination. This is a change which does credit both to the profession and the public, and Mr. Irving must have his full share of the credit; his tact and taste have been largely instrumental in setting a seal of something more than respectability on his profession and showing that there is a dignity in his art which raises it "above the foot-lights and the green-room." The demand for actors who have the traditions of good society as well as the culture of good education has grown greatly during the last

few years, and the morals as well as the manners of the stage have risen in tone. Men of family and character have joined the profession and it can show some shining examples of feminine talent and virtue. As a wholesome sense of the equality of all men of education and of all women of pure lives and refined culture leavens English society, the moral influence of the Theatre on the public mind, and of public feeling on the whole class of actors will be increasingly beneficial and elevating. Mr. Irving is by no means the originator of this movement in the right direction, but his personal charm and influence have contributed, there can be no doubt, to add grace to the virtues of others.

In private society Mr. Irving is a perfectly courteous gentleman, always ready to discuss his art with the lady next to him at dinner, and if she is intelligent and bright-witted he will be frank and responsive; but like every man whose whole life, and thought, and endeavor have been directed into a channel which he has chosen for himself, the flow is checked as by a frost in an uncongenial atmosphere; and as he is probably one of those men who will not submit to be dull he will, likely enough, become satirical.

As a host he is said to be genial, lavish, emi-

nently festive. His establishment "behind the scenes," at the Lyceum includes a good cook; he has a pretty dining-room there and gives very elegant little suppers to small parties of friends. Great suppers too have been given at the Lyceum, on the stage itself, in honor of a long run, a closing night, or some distinguished guest.

We have a pleasing picture of Irving and Delaunay having met at a private house after Mr. Irving had seen the French actor play in *Les Caprices de Marianne* in London. "What a Romeo he would make!" Irving had exclaimed on that occasion. Delaunay, now, in private, recited the poem of Fortunio, and Irving in return went through Hood's poem of Eugene Aram. But the Englishman had the advantage, for he understood French and Delaunay does not understand English. However he was able to appreciate Mr. Irving's variety of tone and accent and the two actors are said to have exchanged some little *souvenirs* — snuff-box and seal, or what not.

Mr. Irving's sense of humor must be keen; it lurks in the droop of his eyelids, and in the angle of his lips which close with a peculiar absence of curve, and he is said to have no small powers of satire. His mannerism and eccentricities of ac-

cent lay him open, of course, to imitation and mimicry and he has been most successfully caricatured. In a burlesque, *The Corsican Brothers & Co.*, which came out when the melodrama was revived at the Lyceum, Mr. Royce — now unfortunately disabled from all work by paralysis — gave an imitation of him which was almost too faithful to deserve the name of burlesque; and not long since a young actor mimicked him with much success in another burlesque. Mr. Irving, who cannot take such mockery in very good part, went nevertheless to see the performance. Not long after he met the culprit at dinner and made himself so infinitely agreeable that his new acquaintance began to feel some qualms of conscience, till presently, when matters theatrical came under discussion, Mr. Irving turned to the younger man and said in a tone of bland enquiry: "And are you an actor too Mr. Z?"

Mr. Irving will probably take with him his dresser Walter, a very important personage who has been in his service many years. Walter feels it a point of honor to turn his master out a finished work of art, every evening, but the impatience of Irving's temperament makes this a matter of no small difficulty. "I can never send him on to the stage tidy — Mr. Irving won't let

me have a chance of making him tidy," is Walter's lament.

A very important person is a good dresser; indeed, it is to him and to the skilled carpenter that we owe the relief of short "waits" while changes are made between the acts; and without a practised and thoughtful dresser rapid changes of character—such as Dubosc and Lesurques for instance—would be simply impossible. It is his business to have every article of dress ready to be slipped on in proper order, and so conveniently held that no fumbling or wriggling is needed; and in Mr. Irving's case, as he is extremely short-sighted, it is Walter's duty to attend him to the very verge of the side-scene and at the last moment utter the warning words: "Glasses Sir!" or the audience might be edified by seeing Louis XI. or Hamlet wearing *pince-nez*.

An amusing incident—an unrehearsed effect as it has become customary to call such mishaps—once arose out of Irving's short-sightedness in a performance of *Iolanthe*. Count Tristan has to give a talisman to the blind girl, and at the very moment when his little "property" was most necessary to the action of the play he unluckily dropped it. Mr. Cooper, who was playing Sir Geoffrey, was as short-sighted as his chief and after a

few moments of *sotto-voce* dialogue: "Pick it up — pick it up my boy."

"I can't see it, I can't feel it—" The blind Princess was forced to stoop and pick up the indispensable talisman, which she alone could see.

Mr. Irving like every really romantic actor has admirers, personal and devoted admirers of the gentler sex. A correspondent of *The Theatre*, signing himself M. S. C., ends an account of a "country cousin's" visit to the Lyceum, with a description of an incident illustrating this — how three young girls lingered till the house was empty and the curtain drawn up, showing the darkened and desolate stage, where, "amid that latter-end chaos, stood Mr. Irving, *in propria persona*," with two or three persons to whom he was talking. "There he is really *himself*," whispered one of the three — and we fancy we can see him in his great coat and hat and *pince-nez;* and it is saying something for the prestige of an actor that it should stand the test of such disillusionment. "I think," adds M. S. C., "that Mr. Irving is much to be congratulated on having so entirely gained the sympathy of the best portion of creation, and his fair admirers that they have concentrated their interest on a not less worthy hero."

We have heard a story of a damsel of good

degree whose dream in life it was to touch Henry Irving, if it were but the hem of his garment, and who to this end was content to wait outside the theatre after a performance of Hamlet and open his cab door. What was her delight then when—unconscious no doubt of the fair one's rank in life—he rewarded her services with a penny which she ever after wore on her watch chain! *Se non é vero é ben trovato.* On another occasion, a party of maiden enthusiasts were so happy to pick up a glove dropped by the object of their admiration—four fingers, a thumb, the palm, the back—seven precious fragments to treasure in their desks! And who shall say that hero-worship is dead? The Hero as Actor! Carlyle omitted him from his classification.

We have done our best to remedy the omission. Henry Irving is not, to be sure, a hero to us as he is to a Hamlet-stricken or Romeo-sick damsel. He does not bewitch us altogether out of our critical faculty; but he has stirred our feelings, roused our imagination to lofty flights, our intelligence to noble conceptions, and our sympathy to genial warmth. More than this, we take it does not lie within the actor's province. The next step must be to worthy deeds, and these lie as far beyond his ken of his audience as they do

beyond that of the preacher. But, looking back on his own utterances, and reflecting on the high position he has always claimed for the stage, we believe Mr. Irving will gladly allow us to rank him with the preacher, and as one of the high-priests of a humanizing vocation. "The influence of a great work of art, indeed, is like that of the heroes of a past generation; it is seen through the idealizing medium of imagination. I hope you agree that this is a better thing than the influence of a self-complacent preacher, who offers himself as an example good to follow." So says a sympathetic English writer; and Mr. Irving himself has said: "It is fair to judge an art by what should be its highest aim." (Preface to Talma on the Actor's Art.)

So, for much wholesome pleasure, for many inspiring thoughts, and above all for the keen enjoyment which comes of enlarged apprehension and generous emotion accept our thanks

Henry Irving.

CHAPTER V.

ELLEN TERRY.

WILLIAM TERRISS. THOS. MEAD.

MISS ELLEN TERRY was born at Coventry, on the 27th of February, 1847; she first appeared on the stage at Hull, almost as an infant, in a pantomime in which others of her family were engaged, and at the age of ten played the child Mamillius in *The Winter's Tale*, which Charles Kean brought out as one of a series of Shakespearian performances very beautifully and elaborately mounted; she also played Arthur in *King John*, in 1858, with as much success as her elder sister Kate in 1852.

When the Keans gave up the management of the Princess's and left London, Miss Ellen Terry was for a time lost sight of. She probably went to serve her apprenticeship to stage-business under Mr. Chute, for many years the manager of the Bath and Bristol theatres. On the 16th of September, 1862, we find her at the Theatre Royal,

Bristol, playing Cupid in Brough's extravaganza of Endymion, her sister Kate taking the part of Diana; and again she appeared in Perseus and Andromeda, "making the most of the small part of Dictys and being most graceful and effective." On December 5th of that year she shared a benefit with her sister, and they took their leave of the Bristol public in some lines written for Kate Terry to speak on the occasion.

There is no discipline so varied and incessant as that of the permanent staff of a provincial theatre and Miss Terry had profited by her experience and learnt to turn her exceptional beauty and talents to good account when she made her *début* in London, March, 1863, as Gertrude in *The Little Treasure*, at the Haymarket. To judge from the critiques on this performance Miss Terry's qualifications for the part were the same characteristics as now, in riper age, make her Letitia Hardy so delightful. "There is nothing conventional or affected in her performance; the young girl of buoyant spirits, kindly heart, impulsive emotions, and somewhat remiss education is presented in her natural shape, free and uncontrolled as her long black hair." After this, for about ten months, from March, 1863, till January, 1864, she played Hero in *Much Ado About*

Nothing, Mary Meredith in *The American Cousin*, and other secondary parts.

Miss Ellen Terry married and left the stage while still a mere child; she was not yet twenty when she again came before the public at the end of October, 1867, in a rather dismal play, *The Double Marriage*, adapted from the French by Charles Reade for the New Queen's Theatre, London. She also played Mrs. Mildmay in *Still Waters*, and Katharine in the common stage version of the Taming of the Shrew known as *Katharine and Petruchio*. It was in this comedy, on the 26th of December, 1867, that she and Mr. Irving first acted together; and we have it on good authority that his foresight of his own powers and his judicious appreciation of Miss Terry's talents—she was but nineteen—led him to promise that when he should become the manager of a London theatre she should be his "leading lady."

She left the theatre in January, 1868, and did not reappear on the London stage till 1874 when she returned to the Queen's as Philippa Chester in the *Wandering Heir*. After playing for a few months at Astley's Theatre she went to the Prince of Wales' where the *Merchant of Venice* was rashly put upon the stage with Mr. Coghlan

as Shylock and with scarcely a redeeming point in the performance but Ellen Terry's Portia. This was then and has often since been highly praised and, in fact, the figure, presence, and voice of the actress lend themselves to the impersonation. The heiress of Belmont might have been well content to look the part in real life as Miss Terry looks it on the stage. But the conception of the woman behind the beauty, grace and gorgeousness of the Italian lady is not in our opinion quite satisfactory; there is a fidgetiness not to say flightiness of demeanor now and then in Miss Terry's Portia which would be suitable in a woman who assumed the lawyer's dress for a mere joke but which is not quite "of a piece" with the lofty earnestness of Portia's mind and the gravity of her purpose. In her doctor's gown Miss Terry affected suitable dignity, but in other parts of the play, particularly the casket scene, her restlessness was fatiguing; it expressed the nervousness of curiosity rather than the anxiety of passion.

"Sumptuous sweetness," is a particularly happy phrase used by a critic in *Scribner's Magazine* for Miss Terry's appearance. He undervalues her acting though his judgment errs on the right side. "He would like," he says, "a little less nature and a little more art;" and on the whole we are of his

mind — only, Miss Terry's nature is so winningly engaging that it is ungracious to say so. But of all this our readers will, before long, have the pleasure of judging for themselves.

Some of her greatest successes were achieved at the Court Theatre, a small but convenient house at the south-west end of London. It was here that on the 29th of March, 1878, an adaptation by W. G. Wills of Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield* was brought out under the name of *Olivia* which, owing mainly to Miss Terry's delightful performance of Olivia herself, supported by Mr. Hermann Vezin and Mr. Terriss, held the stage for a very long run till Mr. Irving secured her services as *prima donna* at the Lyceum.

He showed his insight and judgment. The change for the better, so far as he himself was concerned must have been inestimable. Mrs. Crowe and her sister must have failed in many ways to satisfy his requirements and so far as the part of Ophelia is concerned Miss Isabel Bateman as compared with Miss Terry was in every respect wanting. *Punch*, January 11th, 1879, says: "If anything more intellectually conceived or more exquisitely wrought out than Miss Terry's Ophelia has been seen on the English stage in this generation, it has not been within *Punch's* memory."

Since that night, December 30th, 1878, Mr. Irving and Miss Terry have not been parted. She has had intervals of much-needed rest when he has produced plays in which her appearance was not required, but she has not acted elsewhere and it is to be hoped that an alliance so extraordinarily favorable to the interests of art—and, we may add a hope, to their well-earned advantage and profit—may continue for many years.

There are parts still for them to act together. Lear and Cordelia at once suggest themselves, Malvolio and Viola, Joseph Surface and Lady Teazle, nay, and why not Henri de Lagardère and Blanche de Nevers?—for *The Duke's Motto* is one of the most delightful melodramas ever played on the English stage. The hero's part is captivating in that delicately amorous way which is wonderfully sympathetic to Mr. Irving, if we may judge from his acting in the third act of *Hamlet* and in the supper scene in *The Corsican Brothers*, where he expresses the tender and suppressed phase of love in a captivating manner.

Of all the parts Miss Terry has played with Mr. Irving Ophelia is the most pathetic, Beatrice the most brilliant. These two extremes of the scale of feeling are what she deals with best. In the first act of "*The Cup*," where again what may

be called domestic pathos is the ruling sentiment, her acting was exquisite, her song simply heart-breaking without any rational cause for the emotion it roused. In Letitia Hardy again, where airy spirits and judicious impertinence are required she is perfectly fascinating. But Miss Terry is not a tragedy queen, and if she cares to keep the hearts she has won she will still play such parts as she is mistress of—*facile princeps*.

We shall see her here as Ophelia, as Henrietta Maria, as Letitia Hardy, Portia, Ruth (*Eugene Aram*), Jeanette (*The Lyon's Mail*), and above all as Beatrice—a part, which if Shakespeare had but seen her play it, he might have believed he had written for her. In the lighter scenes she is the very woman Benedick loved—the very woman perhaps that Shakespeare himself loved, who knows? In the church scene she is tragical—just as tragical as Beatrice and Miss Terry ought ever to be. All is admirable from beginning to end.

Miss Terry is rarely heard as a reciter but her singularly pathetic voice—*voix voileé* even when she is at her gayest—is heard to great advantage in this kind of monologue. In the course of a miscellaneous entertainment given, after Charles I., for Mr. Irving's benefit in August, 1880, she re-

cited a poem by Lewis, *The Captive ;* "so admirable, so full of tragic feeling, of skill in varied intonation, of art to make one forget the silliness of the words in the emotion with which she charged them, that one could hardly regret that such rubbish should have been chosen." In truth, as she repeated them Miss Terry was the poet; she interpreted the situation which the author had been unable to find fitting expression for: that of a sane woman imprisoned as a mad woman by her husband and at last really losing her reason in despair.

Mr. William Terriss.

The *jeune premier*, for such he is practically, who now plays second to Mr. Irving in almost every piece he puts on the stage, is a gentleman by birth and education and was brought up to the Navy. Bitten, however by the insidious demon which leaves stage mania in the blood, at the age of twenty he entered the dramatic profession, acting first at Birmingham in 1869. In London, he was at first a member of the Bancrofts' company at the Prince of Wales'; then he went to Drury Lane, and to the Strand, where he played Doricourt in *The Belle's Stratagem* through a very

long run. His first very successful effort however, as a work of art, was as Squire Thornhill in Wills' play of *Olivia*, in which Miss Terry also made her mark. He did not join the Lyceum staff till 1880, when he played Chateau Renaud in *The Corsican Brothers*. Mr. Terriss is careful, conscientious and, we should imagine, a very capital and trustworthy second to act with; his independence is probably not very pronounced, and he acts like a man who relies enormously on habit, whose stage-business—once thoroughly mastered in rehearsal—has become part of the *rôle* to him forever after. He is not an imaginative actor and his voice is somewhat rigid and unsympathetic; and yet he is much more than a mere machine, for he has taste and intelligence. His play is perhaps less mechanical than it sometimes appears by contrast with the impulsive vehemence of his chief; it is possible too that his own discretion keeps his energies at bay, for no stage on earth could hold a second Irving however far he might lag behind the first.

Mr. Thomas Mead.

One of the actors who appeared at the Lyceum theatre Sunderland on the opening night, when

Henry Irving first appeared as a professional actor, was "Tom. Mead," now an honorably distinguished member of Mr. Irving's company. This excellent and trustworthy artist was born at Cambridge (England) in 1819, and trained in the best traditions of the old school — a school somewhat ponderous and over-emphatic but careful in its reading, accurate in its pronunciation and serious, though far from subtle, in the interpretation and delivery of blank verse. When we hear Mr. Mead give out the speech of the Ghost in *Hamlet*, or of the friar in *Much Ado About Nothing*, in his full deliberate tones we hear the echo — perhaps the last echo — of the voices of a former generation of actors whose method is disappearing under the "aesthetic" reaction of our day. Naturalism is the watchword of the modern aesthetic — a naturalism which, when pushed to excess, is the bane of dignity and the ruin of style; and though the impatience of the juvenile play-goer might prove refractory if this grave elocution were applied to any less solemn parts than those Mr. Mead now fills, we would fain point out that it has unmistakably that stamp of *style* which is as stately as it is now rare. We are thankful not to be obliged to criticise Mr. Mead in light parts, it might be a trial to sit through them; but many actors, who

rank higher than he now does in popular favor, might with advantage have an infusion of his complaint. He often forces rhythm to excess, no doubt, sometimes to the extent of misreading; still, such as he is, mark him with respect — he is the last of the old English type of actors.

He first acted at Devonport in 1841, and afterwards worked in the north of England, making himself generally useful, as was then the custom; it was not till 1848 that he appeared in London, and then at one of the less fashionable theatres, as Sir Giles Overreach. He first became known to the "West-end" public in 1852 when he took an engagement at Drury Lane and played leading parts for some years there, and afterwards at the St. James. He was thought well enough of to be engaged as a "star" in various provincial theatres, and Mr. Irving has many times *supported* him at Sunderland, Edinburgh, and Manchester.

There can be no clearer evidence of the strength of the reaction in art that has characterized the last decade than the relative position the two actors now stand in — nor can there be any better proof of the magnanimity of their minds and the soundness of their natures, than the faithful alliance of the two men.

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